Writing Guides for (Almost) Every Occasion

Writing Guides for (Almost) Every Occasion

WAKE FOREST UNIVERSITY

Contents

Foreword

JON SMART

Genres in writing are never entirely homogenous. Variation in writing emerges from individual influence along with the powerful, more systematic factors like frequency and tradition. In fact, as we use language in specific ways, our goals, experiences, and values shape the characteristics of individual genres. In writing, for novices to a new genre, it can be useful to see the trends and structures that make communicating in a specific genre more effective. A guide to writing in a genre, consequently, provides insight into how what is actually happening in discourse communities that use the genre by analyzing current trends and the rationale for said practices. In this brief volume, the authors of each chapter offer insights and practical advice on writing in a range of genres, from folk music ballads to university mission statements. Each guide is based on careful analysis of

authentic texts from their respective genres.

In a way, writing guides are their own unique genre. They follow common rhetorical moves and feature instructions, guiding principles, and textual examples (with occasional activities or checklists). In the following chapters, the authors repurpose the writing guide genre format to explore unique and often under-studied genres. Each chapter gives a brief but useful glimpse into the conventions of a genre, along with insight into how discourse communities and communicative purposes have influenced and constrained the features of the genre.

Part one of the book introduces three highly personalized genres of writing. The first chapter explains how to begin a blog to readers new to the idea. Christina Darby guides the reader through planning, authoring, and promoting a lifestyle blog. She explains the function of a blog (and the dual purposes it serves for blogger and audience) and gives instructions for creating posts that are engaging for readers. Darby draws on examples from

leading lifestyle blogs and highlights key strategies that make these blogs so effective. The chapter ends with particular attention paid to practical issues of blog authorship: language choices, tone, organizational strategies, use of multimedia, and advice for picking a blog platform.

In the second chapter, Ashley Fountain explains to an audience of undergraduate students how write a letter to the editor. The guide examines the role of this venerable genre in modern media based on the author's analysis of recent letters in the *New York Times*. Issues around authoring a letter such as how to make the letter stand out and get published, what topics to address, and how to tailor your letter to the newspaper's audience are discussed with helpful numbered lists of details to lead the writer through the process. Fountain lists and explains traditional features of the letter-to-the-editor genre and then offers five key strategies for writing an effective letter with examples taken from authentic letters to the *Times*.

In "Write to Impress: A Guide for Chinese ESL Students on Personal Statements for College Applications," Li guides Chinese students looking to study at North American universities through planning and writing an effective personal statement with a mix of humor and practical advice. The guide begins by considering the goals of the personal statement: why university admissions value them and why the applicant should invest her/his effort in this particular form of self-promotion and reflection. It then lays out concrete recommendations for word choice, grammar, and structure. Along with this instruction, Li offers step-by-step strategies for brainstorming meaningful materials and discusses what makes a good story in a personal statement. The guide concludes with a checklist for writing a personal statement that should be helpful for anyone interested in this unique, high-stakes genre.

The second part of the book includes three written genres related to the expression of *authority*, whether that

authority be individual, or institutional, or political. Alyssa Klier begins this section by analyzing the genre of professional emails and providing even established professionals (despite the title) with useful insight into how and why we use email. The guide includes recommendations and examples genre-specific elements of correspondence (e.g., subject lines, greetings, closings). As a final hands-on addition, Klier has included tasks for readers to practice her suggestions.

The interpersonal nature of email contrasts sharply with the next chapter on public-oriented writing from authority. Darby Deutsch's takes on the genre of university mission statements and provides a reader-friendly, hands-on guide for universities to define and express their values and goals. Deutsch compares mission statements from major universities and breaks them down into their components. She examines the rhetorical and linguistic elements that make effective mission statements and then leads the reader to draft their own statement.

The next chapter examines an even more authoritative genre. Katie Clower's "How to Write a Presidential Speech" analyzes what makes a great political speech. Clower outlines what goals a presidential speech should have (how to connect to an audience and how to make the message meaningful and lasting) and the rhetorical moves that presidential speeches tend to include (in terms of language and tone). The chapter also offers practical advice on what not to do in a speech, based on analyses of previous speeches from US Presidents. And although the focus is on presidential speeches, in reality this guide has useful directions for writing (or critiquing) any politically oriented speeches.

The final section of this book includes three guides that focus on addressing the challenges of writing effectively for particular audiences. The first chapter in this section is a writing guide to stand-up comedy. In the guide, Reese Markland explores what stand-up comedy is, how it works, and what are effective rhetorical strategies for being funny. She offers a

step-by-step process for writing a comedy routine and analyzes examples of effective five-minute sets from well-known comedians. The guide dissects the integral components of stand-up comedy, offering insight into the genre for not only aspiring comedians but also anyone interested in the genre.

The following chapter, Jordan Houston's "Contemporary Folk Music and You" reimagines the genre of writing guide, mixing in analysis and storytelling along with self-aware guidelines for writing hit protest-themed folk songs. The guide begins by defining folk music through a summary of 20th Century American icons of folk (Dylan, Baez, Ochs, etc.) and explores in depth a popular genre of folk music song: the ballad. Houston outlines the conventions of a ballad, from the meter and rhyme to the topics covered in famous modern ballads. He then discusses how modern folk music is closely connected to political issues, current events, and even humor, returning to examples to illustrate the rich history of protest and activism that are a part of

modern folk music. In the end, this "writing guide" is as much about understanding the composition and history of great folk songs as it is a manual for creation.

The final guide in this volume, Jones' chapter on writing engaging scientific journalism starts with a discussion of how to convince your reader to read your article. To do this, the author blends research on science journalism with practical tips and examples of the genre. The guide asks potential writers to consider making word choices accessible to casual readers; while some technical terms are necessary, in Jones' explanation, the rest of a sentence should use clear, high-frequency vocabulary when possible to explain ideas. The guide then expands to rhetorical strategies and proposes using metaphor and personal examples as useful tools for helping readers grasp complex scientific concepts. The examples and information here should be valuable for anyone looking to explain difficult or technical information to readers who may not share the same background.

This collection of nine brief writing

guides demonstrate how broadly writing varies across communities and purposes. We see both systematic differences in mechanics and rhetoric, as well as opportunities for individual creation in each of these genres. There are useful examples, practical guidelines, and even hands-on practice in many of the guides here, which should help writers of almost any background begin working on that writing project they have been planning.

A Beginner's Guide to Creating a Blog

CHRISTINA DARBY

Are you always suggesting your favorite beauty products, travel tips, home decor tips, or recipes with your friends and family? Do you often find yourself jotting down fun new things to try or activities to experiment with? If you've answered yes to these questions, starting a lifestyle blog might be for you. Starting a lifestyle blog might be the perfect way to combine your passions and hobbies. Sharing your hobbies and passions with others can be a rewarding creative outlet. You might ask, how is blogging different than just posting on social media? With a lifestyle blog, you have to engage your reader enough to keep reading, but also be transparent. You're not sharing your favorite recipes or travel guides in hopes of getting a certain

amount of likes, but because you already find yourself doing this for family and friends. Blogging that balance between a personal diary where you can record your ideas and adventures as well as a presentation of your hobbies. By following this guide, I will prepare you to write with that balance as well as organization in both blog structure and content.

What is a Blog?

A blog can be defined as "chronological publications of personal thoughts and web links that are traditionally text based, but also include a variety of audio and visual formats" (Chai & Kim, 2010). Blogs have become an increasingly popular and powerful social media medium, especially amongst Generation Y. Generation Y is anyone born between 1980 and 1994. In a study conducted by Cara Colucci and Erin Cho at Parsons The New School for Design, results from twenty-eight interviews and 344 online survey responses, readers trust a blog largely based on three different dimensions: post and content authenticity, curation, and post frequency.

That being said, it is important that

when you start a blog, your posts have a balance between genuity, creativity, and clarity. When writing, you want to be open with your reader so they feel as if you are a real person they can take advice, recipes, designs, and tips from. If you present yourself as something or someone unattainable, readers will not see themselves in you and therefore disengage. We will get into more details on how exactly to achieve this in your posts in the "lifestyle meets language" section of the guide.

Secondly, the selection, organization, and presentation of your online content is crucial. If you cannot easily navigate, relate to, or follow then nobody else will be able to. This guide will help you sharpen your brainstorming skills to develop killer content ideas and the tools to organize your blog in a way that even your technologically challenged grandmother can follow!

In this age of instant technology at our fingertips, readers expect immediacy. They expect you to be on top of reviewing and applying new fashion trends, trendy

restaurants, and uncovering new places. Nobody is going to want your "guide to holiday home decor" after Thanksgiving, but you can't be silent from Thanksgiving to Christmas. Get creative with your content so you can get people talking. You need to make sure your adventurous side shows through your posting frequency. While frequency is important, make sure you don't sacrifice quality for quantity. It's about finding that balance. We will go more into depth about this in the Writing Process section of the guide.

Now that you know the three basic things to keep in mind to get your reader base to invest in you, let's get you invested in creating a blog!

Aspects of a Successful Blog

Looking at three different "successful blogs," The Magnolia Blog, Wit and Delight, and The Blissful Mind. In this context, a I am defining a "successful blog" as having a large following and are suggested on many "blogs to follow" websites. Through observing numerous posts from these three blogs, I have discovered that the basic structure is as follows:

Brief Introduction

Have a brief introduction that usually starts with a general topic like the Holidays, for example. Acknowledge the topic. For example, author of the Magnolia Blog Joanna Gaines opens her post like so: "There seems to be no limit to the nostalgia that the holiday season brings." After this general opening statement, give about two more sentences where you start to personalize the situation. For example Joanna's post continues with "Every year, I find myself entirely captivated by our family Christmas tree—despite the fact that the ornaments and decorations have changed very little over the years." She carefully opens information about herself as she expands the topic, but is not too specific yet.

Presentation of the topic

After you have made the very general topic more personal, move into the topic of the blog. The first sentence after your introduction should be the WHY behind the article. Continuing with Joanna's post something along the lines of: "Our family's tradition of gifting ornaments each year

began with Chip's mom, Gayle." After the presentation of her family's holiday tradition, she gives a brief history, why it is meaningful, and how the tradition still applies.

Give a WHY

Although we have established that people like the personal aspects of blogs, it is important you give your post and topic some substance other than just being a part of your life. The WHY is what they find most fascinating. Joanna's WHY is as follows: "I wanted to share this tradition of ours because I've grown to realize over the years that the things we choose to bring into our homes for the holidays—whether it be ornaments, garland, wreaths or stockings—serve a greater purpose than mere decoration. It's really our family's history that we get to unwrap year after year." We can all relate to a family tradition we have, whether it's during the holiday season or not, and Joanna taps into this. This last paragraph is almost as if she's predicting your part of the conversation where you say "I have a cool tradition in my family where we give an ornament to every

family member that represents our year." We will talk about this later in the guide, but blogs are meant to be interactive and conversational. Giving a WHY is a really important element that helps to achieve that interactive experience and helps you, the writer, really focus your writing as well.

A list or pictures to further demonstrate the topic: Either before or after you've given a why, visual aids and structure is a large part of making a successful blog. You want your reader to live your experience—that is why you're sharing it, so don't make it difficult for them. Visual aids allow people to (a) imagine themselves and (b) see the specifics. People like lists and it helps people stay on track. Psychologist and author Dr David Cohen believes putting something on a list makes people more likely to do something. It makes a file cabinet in your brain. Make a file cabinet for reader! Even with simple things! A good example of a list is from Wit and Delight (witanddelight.com):

15 ways to Instantly Improve your Mood this Holiday Season:

1-Minute Fixes:

1. Drink more water: Okay, I know what you might be thinking—Drink more water, really? Yet despite the simplicity, it works. Being dehydrated can negatively impact your mood, not to mention your metabolism. So keep a bottle by your side, set an alarm, and at the top of each hour, CHUG.
2. Jump around: Whether it's bringing out the jumping jacks, using an invisible jump rope, or cranking up the volume to "Santa Claus is Coming to Town," do whatever you have to do to get those positive endorphins pumping.
3. Light up lavender: Ambient scents of lavender can work wonders on your mood, so light a candle and burn away that unwanted layer of stress. (The scent of orange has also been proven to reduce anxiety.)
4. Go toward the green: Not only does the color green symbolize happiness, but psychologists have also said it can create the feeling, too. Now, you have even more reason to stare at the tree.
5. Say cheese: While smiling can

immediately turn a frown upside down, snacking on pieces of Parmesan can, too. Seriously! It's one of the best foods for beating stress, with 400-500 mg of mood-boosting tryptophan per 100g.

Author Kathryn structures her list in a way that keeps you intrigued with a simple and fun title such as "say cheese" and then elaborates. This is a great example of how a list should function and how they are presented.

Read more about the psychology of lists: https://www.theguardian.com/lifeandstyle/2017/may/10/the-psychology-of-the-to-do-list-why-your-brain-loves-ordered-tasks

A Brief Conclusion

Wrap up your article in about 3 sentences. This is a good place to include your WHY. Tie everything together and end on a positive note.

Include an "About the Author"

People want to know where the writing is coming from. Write something simple and short including your hobbies,

interests, and why you wanted to create the blog. It provides a window behind the content. All are different, but should be no longer than 5 sentences and should be unique to you and your voice as a blogger.

Find Your Niche

When talking about a niche in ecological biology, a niche is used to define an organism's role in an ecosystem. In the blogging world, think of the ecosystem as every aspect a lifestyle blog could cover: health and fitness, fashion, travel, food and cooking, design, beauty, self-care, mommy blogs, etc. Now think about where you stand in relation to that online ecosystem. Where do you find most of your passions fit? You may have multiple. You may be a mom who wants to emphasize self-care through healthy recipes. While it's ok to touch on multiple niches, it can often cause chaos and disrupt balance in the ecosystem. Having too much to cover can cause you to lose focus and therefore lose readers. That being said, it is not impossible to cover multiple topics. Most bloggers do. Once you pick a main focus then you can weave other topics in as long

as they have a common thread. Let's start by taking this quiz to discover your main niche and then we can look at an example of a blog that does a good job weaving other topics in by using a common thread.

Now that you have a good idea of what your main interests are, you can develop your niche and further develop your voice as a blogger within that niche. Below are good examples of different types of blogs for each of the four niches included in the quiz so you have a good idea of how a successful blog in your niche functions.

Home and Garden: oldbrandnew.com

Food/Recipe: foodiecrush.com

Fashion & Style: weworewhat.com

Health and Self-Care: theblissfulmind.com/category/self-care

For an example of a blog that does a great job using a common thread to weave a lot of these different topics together both organizationally and aesthetically, look at Joanna Gaines' Blog below:

Joanna Gaines + Magnolia Blog

https://magnolia.com/blog

The Magnolia Blog is a good example because although lifestyle blogger Joanna

Gaines has home decor to recipe posts, she uses family as a common way to weave everything together. All of her recipes are heavily family based as well as her posts regarding the home. She references her personal experience with her family at the start of every post. By clearly separating the different posts as well, Joanna Gaines is a successful example of how to incorporate many niches and passions in a lifestyle blog without disrupting the overall aesthetic or creating a chaotic blog.

The Magnolia Blog is successful because it can be classified as a lifestyle blog. A lifestyle creates content inspired and curated by their personal interests and daily activities. If you have multiple interests, a lifestyle blog might be the best way to go!

Pick/Design a Platform

According to my research, WordPress (wordpress.com) is the best platform to use for new bloggers for the following reasons:

1. *It's user friendly.* Technology is great...except for when it isn't. The last thing you want when first getting

started is beautiful ideas and writing but then no where that showcases it because of a complicated platform.

2. *Choices.* With many different themes to chose from, WordPress is easy to customize even without coding or web-building experience.

3. *Resources.* WordPress is the most popular blogging platform, so if you were to get stuck there are lots of online resources that can help you out of your sticky situation!

Create a Unique Name

Now that you have a niche it's time to pick a unique domain name for your blog so you can thrive in your niche. Here are 2 simple rules to follow when creating your domain name:

1. *KISS: Keep It Simple Stupid.* Keep your name short and simple so people can remember. Make sure it's simple, but not simplistic.

2. *Hot Topic.* Make sure the name has something to do with your topic. Don't be "DoodleDandy" if your blog is about self-care. If your blog is about

art and home décor, however, that is a fun name to use.

Brainstorm and Plan

When first starting your blog, you may have so many things jumbled in your mind that you don't know where to begin. Or you have the big idea of how your blog should look and what you WANT to write about, but no specifics. You may just be completely stuck and out of ideas for creative content. Since consistent content is very important in engaging readers and earning the trust of your audience, it is important to carefully curate what you want to talk about. Here are 5 helpful brainstorming blogging tips to live by:

1. Take notes. Keep a list of notes going on your phone or a pocket notebook near you so you have easy access to write something down when inspiration strikes.
2. *Make a "top 10 list."* Sit down and write down your top 10 favorite recipes, beauty products, design trends, or whatever pertains to your niche. Do a post every month with your "top 10"

for that month. This is a post that is simple but allows your readers a sneak peak into what interests you. Make your list specific and personal.

3. *Social media is a tool...use it!* Save or pin posts that inspire you and go back to them when you're stuck.

4. *The camera as a lens.* If you're ever somewhere that inspires you (a coffee shop, a store, a restaurant, etc.) and the space just gives you a good vibe that you can't put into words...document it with a picture. Capture the space through a medium where you don't need to use words and then go back to the picture when you start to write.

5. *Talk it out.* If you're stuck, call someone you can discuss things with. Whether that's your mom, best friend, or cousin call someone you trust and just chat about your passion. You never know what ideas can be born from discussion.

The Writing Process

   You probably always heard in your high

school and college classes that writing is a process. Although blogs are not formal writing, there is still a writing process.

1. *Pick your target audience*. Who are you writing to? Create the person who you think wants to read your blog. Write down their age, gender, personality traits, occupation, and desires. Once you have created this perfect audience member, write to them.
2. *Get your ideas down*. Write something down...this is the scariest step. Once you have something written down you can have a better idea of how to develop your post.
3. *Set a draft due date for yourself*. Create a date for yourself where a rough draft of your newest post HAS to be done.
4. *Self-Edit*. Make revisions for yourself. Maybe the wording sounded better in your head, but now sounds awkward once you read everything together. Maybe something is misspelled. This is your time to smooth out your blog.

5. *Get a fresh pair of eyes.* The day before you want to publish your post, send it to someone you trust...your mom, a friend, or someone who has experience with blogging.

6. *Be your audience.* Read your post a final time as your reader. Make sure the post is easy to read, simple to follow, and interesting. Ask yourself: Would I trust me? After reading it over. If your answer is yes, POST!

7. *DO YOUR RESEARCH!* You need to know what you are talking about. If you do not do your research you will significantly lower your credibility with your readers and they will not trust you. Not doing your research has consequences and severe backlash, especially in this era of instant communication. For example, if you are writing a food blog about great gluten free snacks and you include ezekiel bread (a product that many often wrongfully think is gluten free) and a celiac (someone who cannot digest gluten) trusts your blog and then has a reaction, there will most

likely be repercussions. So...research, research, research!!!

Language meets Lifestyle: Specific language use in lifestyle blogs

So now that you have a clear picture of your blogging path, let's talk about the specifics. How do I actually write the content?

Keep it personal.

Blogs are unique in that readers are drawn in by the fact that a person much like them rather than an expert is behind the craft, design, recipe, etc. They want to hear your voice. They want that rawness in your writing. To accomplish this, use personal language. First person voice and pronouns are more than welcome. Don't be afraid to use "I" and "my." In fact, use them as much as possible! Include personal anecdotes and stories and why this product, recipe, etc. is important or useful to you. You want the reader to think of you as a relatable person from the beginning, especially in the introduction of a post. Hook them in! Here is an example

of an introduction of a post about self-care during the holidays from Wit and Delight:

Like millions of other people in the world, I live for the holiday season. The twinkling lights. The constant cycle of cookies in the oven. The Family Stone and Elf playing on repeat. Peppermint and gingerbread EVERYTHING. I mean, what's not to love? Heck, I even adore the tacky ugly sweaters.

Be Specific

Especially when describing WHY someone should buy or do something, you want them to have clear expectations and guidance. Use active verbs, adjectives, and assertive language.

For my body, daily walks are my favorite thing. Some people hate walking, but I will gladly do it everyday because it gets my body moving, and I can't quiet my mind at the same time. I also throw in strength training 2x a week, and I'm slowing trying to incorporate more yoga into my routine.

The above example from The Blissful Mind blog (theblissfulmind.com) detailing the author's self care routine demonstrates specificity. Instead of simply saying she exercises to get her mind in the right place,

she gives a specific detail about her exercise routine that many people in her target audience can relate to.

Make Lists

Lists make it easy for your reader to follow along. It breaks information up and makes the information seem more "doable." It is a simple yet effective way to present lots of information. Lists are also a good way to organize information.

Make it conversational

Although it is highly encouraged that you do your research before writing and posting, blogs are not formal research papers. There is no reason to use formal language. Find the balance between writing exactly how you talk and gently guiding the reader through your world. Your language should be unique to you. For example, if you always say "okie dokie," let your blog writing reflect that. It not only makes your writing come to life, but makes the reader think that you are talking to them...that you're there own personal Joanna Gaines or Giada De Laurentiis. Let loose in your language! For example in this excerpt from lifestyle blogger Gala

Darling's blog, we get a great glimpse into her personality and the overall tone of her blog:

> I started creating online courses and filming videos. I've now written a bestselling book (and recently finished my second!), I travel the world speaking to and teaching badass babes, and my life is fun as FUCK.

From the above example, we get information about Gala as a blogger but we also have a greater understanding of her blog as a whole.

Another way to keep blogs conversational is by asking rhetorical questions. Rhetorical questions force your reader to participate. Rhetorical questions allow the reader to check in with themselves.

Show Don't Tell

Be specific in your language choices. Describe everything as if your reader is in the same room as you to draw them in. An easy way to show this is by appealing to the 5 senses. Going back to the example from

Wit and Delight, the author uses phrases such as "twinkling lights" and "constant cycle of cookies in the oven" to appeal to the senses.

Photos and Visuals

Blogs are interactive. Meaning readers want to be a part of your experience. While you should always be as descriptive as you can in your writing, visual aids such as pictures are great ways to get your reader to experience what you want them to. That being said...

Take Pictures

Keep your phone or a camera on you at all times for inspiration, but also to aid your storytelling. Photos are a big part of blogs and help tell the story as well as aid in achieving an overall blog aesthetic.

Picky about Pics

Make sure you select your pictures with purpose. Don't just pick any picture...make sure it aids your blog in some way and you're not just putting it there to fill space.

Angles

Experiment with angles so that your pictures have variety and personality.

More tips on photography can be found

here: https://www.thesitsgirls.com/photography-tips

Organizational Strategies

(Attention, lifestyle bloggers: This is especially for you!)

As we have established by now, a lifestyle blogger can carefully occupy different niches. There is a particular way that makes this easier: organization. It makes your life easier and easier for your reader to follow along! For any blogger, this is also a good tip you can take to creatively divvy up your topics. Title AND label your post. Label what category your post falls in.

Other Examples

Look to these blogs for more examples of successful blogs. All exemplify the tenants of good blogging discussed in the guide:

- Wit and Delight: witanddelight.com
- Gala Darling: galadarling.com
- Apartment Therapy: www.apartmenttherapy.com

Concluding Remarks

Now that you have all the basics, it's in your hands. Start observing, typing, and developing those amazing ideas. Starting

a blog can be overwhelming if you look at examples and follow a basic outline you will soon be comfortable to find your place in the blogosphere.

How to Write a Letter to the Editor

ASHLEY FOUNTAIN

Writing a letter to the editor is a great way for someone to engage with a publication and a topic that is interesting to them. If you're reading this guide, then you likely have some inspiration for writing a letter, but even if you don't have inspiration in mind, this guide can still work to help inspire you to think about a topic. For reference, my guide is based off research I did on 53 letters published about 11 different topics from the New York Times.

So, what is a letter to the editor? A letter to the editor is a letter sent to a publication about issues of concern from its readers. Letters to the editor are often some of the most popular pieces to read in a publication because of their short and emotional nature. They are a quick way for

people to begin to understand different sides of a popular topic without having to read through the lengths of opinion pieces. Letters also play a crucial role as a media gatekeeper and a powerful way for publication's readers to engage with the editors and writers of a certain publication. As an undergraduate who is constantly engaging with a wide range of topics, you may be interested in looking at issues from a wide variety of angles so you may enjoy letters to the editor. You also may find passions for certain subjects that you want to write letters to an editor for or be interested in getting involved with a certain publication or topic and use these letters as a way to open the door to future careers in these areas. It is impressive to be able to show a thoroughly researched piece published in a popular online or in-person magazine or newspaper if you are looking for a career in that area or writing in general.

The key to writing a successful letter to the editor is not just in writing an accurate and interesting letter but writing a letter that will get published. There is not much

power to your letter if no one sees it or reads it. As a result, it is important to strike a balance between writing something you're passionate about and something people are talking about. Because if it's not an interesting topic that will generate buzz and excitement, then why would the publication publish it? Instead, they'll choose a letter that will garner more attention and interest.

It also must be a topic in which you have some knowledge. The knowledge doesn't necessarily have to be first-hand experience, though that does seem to help people's stories stand out. The knowledge can be a result of careful research and intentional engagement with the topic. But regardless, you must be able to explain it easily as well as convey its relevance and importance to a wide range of people. Especially because of the short nature of letters to the editor, it is so important that you can capture the topic clearly and concisely.

There is a wide range of topics that can be the focus of letters to the editors. Common topics include current events,

politics, and lifestyle topics. While a basic template can be used to construct a letter for a wide range of topics, certain conventions are relevant to some specific topics alone. It is always helpful to look at letters to the editor from the specific genres and publications you hope to submit to before beginning your letter. This way, you know what types of elements they commonly use. Some examples can be found in the back of this writing guide.

Choosing a Topic & Audience

There are likely two main reasons why you are choosing to engage with writing a letter to the editor. For the sake of this section, I'm going to provide advice around these two ideas. Though I do understand that there are many more reasons or that your reasoning could be a combination of the two, I think what I share in this section as a whole will be relevant to a wide range of reasons.

Why you are likely choosing to write a letter to the editor:

1. You are extremely passionate about a particular topic.

2. You have an interest in writing or journalism.

Choosing a topic is easy if you are extremely passionate about a particular topic. But it is important to evaluate that other people are interested in this topic as well as your ability to write about this topic.

1. Do some research into what has been recently published about this topic.
2. Look for a publication that has recently engaged with this topic in some capacity.
3. If you can find recently published works on this topic than it's probably a fit for you to write a letter to the editor on it.
4. If you are not able to find recently published works on the topic you are interested in, then start to look for topics that are more popular and think about how you can relate your passion to the more popular topic.
5. Once you find a topic that is being talked about, take note of the publication (or publications) talking about it.

6. Look at the level of writing of previous letters to the editor of that publication, and make sure that you can match that level of writing about the topic you want to write about.
7. If you cannot meet that level, then look for another publication where your letter may be a better fit.
8. Keep searching until you find a topic and publication that meets your interests and writing level.

Example: As a history major, you may be interested in traditions surrounding U.S. holidays; as a result, you may want to write about a particular tradition you found interesting or angering regarding an upcoming holiday. Since the holiday season is coming up, you would want to write about a topic regarding Christmas or Hanukkah.

Choosing a topic may be a bit more difficult, if you have an interest in writing or journalism. Though it will likely be easier to choose a publication you are interested in writing for.

1. Look to publications that interest you

and think about their recently published pieces.

2. Choose some topics that are interesting to you and see if you can relate any of them to experiences that you have or classes you've taken.

3. Or look to the people around you or your life and experiences and think about something that may be engaging to write about.

4. Do some research into the topics that you are looking at to make sure that they are ones you can confidently write about on a deep level.

5. Once you narrow down your topic, make sure to take note of the publication (or publications) talking about it.

6. Look at the level of writing of previous letters to the editor of that publication, and make sure that you can match that level of writing.

7. Make sure you find a publication that matches your level of writing and a topic that you have some interest and confidence in writing about.

Example: As a writing minor, you may be highly interested in writing and looking to get a piece published. You may love the New York Times and notice they are publishing a lot of political pieces with the upcoming election, so you decide to write a letter applying a concept you learned in your sociology class to the upcoming election.

In conclusion, it is important to choose a topic that interests you and interests other people. As well as to accurately do your research on what types of things are getting published and are getting read. It could also be helpful to gather information on who the editor of the publication is so you can get a sense of you who are technically writing to. Thinking about these things will help you submit your letter to the right publication with the right audience, and that will give it a higher likelihood to get published.

Composing Your Letter

Once you have a topic, you will want to get started composing your letter. Every letter is different, but I'm going to share a basic template for constructing a letter on

almost any topic. Most letters use a reverse argument structure; where the letter opens with a concession, then the middle is an anecdote with evidence asserting the author's credibility, and finally it ends with the claim.

1. *Address the Editor:* One defining feature is setting up who you are talking to; you should simply and clearly address the editor.
2. *What the Letter is in Response to:* It is then helpful to address what you are writing your letter in response to. Often, letters will be in response to articles written by that publication. I think this is helpful because people reading the letter can go back and read the article to gain more context. But you could also just set up some basic context behind what you are writing about.
3. *Concession:* You then add why you are writing this letter, so how you have a different take or affirm what has been previously said about this topic or issue. This sets up your viewpoint for

the rest of the letter and serves as a
topic sentence.

4. *Personal Anecdote as "Evidence":*
Next, you add your evidence, often this
is in the form of a personal anecdote,
but it can also be research and facts.
Showing your experience or research
allows you to develop a sense of
credibility for your letter. Using an
anecdote also allows you to make the
letter engaging.

5. *Claim:* Letters normally end with their
claim and the point they were trying
to make with the letter overall. This
ties the whole thing together and
leaves the reader with a lasting
message.

6. *Signed with Some Distinguishing
Factor:* Lastly, the letter ends with your
name and some distinguishing factor
about you. You can use just your
location, or you could use your
university or anything else you think
that could give the reader a sense of
the perspective you are writing from.

Keys to Writing a Successful Letter to the Editor

A letter to the editor won't be truly successful if it doesn't get published, and a letter to the editor also won't be successful if no one reads it. So, an effective letter is something that will get published and also convey your message in an engaging and clear way to the correct audience who will actively understand and gain something by reading it. I have developed five keys to making sure that your letter will do all of the above things.

1) Use Personal Anecdote/Story: This is the most common thing I found in all of the letters I looked at. I think it was commonly used because it makes the letter engaging and interesting to the reader. It also builds the reader's investment in the letter, as they become invested in your story and who you are. It also builds credibility on the topic because it allows you to share how you have directly experienced or interacted with the topic you are writing about.

Example:

This example provides a personal

anecdote about this person's life and shares how it has impacted their personal experience, thus building the reader's investment in their story and argument.

2) Make it Engaging: There are a lot of ways to make your letter engaging for the reader; this will make them want to start and keep reading your letter. One way is through the use of anecdotes or stories like I just touched on in the last example. But elements like satire, humor, and other rhetorical devices are also used to bring attention to the story the writer is trying to tell in a different yet effective way. It is also important to keep your letter short so that you do not lose the reader's attention. On average most letters I looked at from the New York Times were only 9.8 lines in length so very short and to the point.

Example:

This example uses humor to build the reader's investment and interest in the letter, as well as playing a little bit on the story and creating this illusion of something from our collective past. All of these elements make it highly engaging for the reader.

3) Assert Your Credibility: Credibility may seem hard to build, especially if you don't have any research or exact educational background on the subject that you are writing a letter about. Especially in publications like the New York Times, a lot of the time, you assert your credibility with elements like titles, schooling, and research. But more broadly, in writing letters to the editor, you can assert your credibility through your personal experiences and the stories you tell. You must make sure anything you assert throughout your letter is accurate. While you don't have to be an expert on your given subject, it is important to do your research and be familiar with the topic at hand.

Example:

This example asserts credibility by the author sharing their experience at a very liberal college. They continue to create credibility as they back up their personal story with statistics about the 2016 election; this shows that they have not only experienced this topic firsthand but also

done their research on it and therefore are credible.

4) Build a Clear Argument: The key to a successful letter is to be able to make your argument clearly and concisely. While there is no set structure behind how to do this, I talked about the basic structure behind building most arguments in the "Composing Your Letter to the Editor" section. The structure is as follows. First, assert why you do or don't agree with what has been published previously about the topic. Then, provide your evidence and experience with the topic; this often also asserts why you have the credibility to write on this topic. Finally, provide your claim. Most letters have all of these elements, even if they are not necessarily in this exact order.

Example:

This example follows the structure I have outlined that works most commonly for building a clear argument. It begins by asserting why he doesn't agree with what has been written in the article. He then provides evidence that supports that idea. And finally, he asserts his claim, in the end,

in to leave the reader with his main message.

5) Know Your Audience: Where you publish your letter is key to it reaching an audience who will not only receive it well but engage with it. If the letter is not the right fit for the publication, then it likely will not get published in the first place. So, it is crucial to conduct research in the beginning phases of writing your letter to make sure that you are writing for the correct audience. You should continue to write to the audience throughout your letter.

Example: If you are writing a hard-hitting political piece about an inconsistency with the upcoming election, then you probably shouldn't publish your letter in *Cosmopolitan*. The audience that reads *Cosmopolitan* isn't going to be looking for that kind of piece and will instead be looking for something.

Successful Examples

I think learning from example is a key to building skills in any particular area. As a result, I thought it would be helpful to include three successful examples for

reference at the end of this writing guide. These examples all exemplify the five keys to writing a successful letter to the editor and would be great to reference when you hit a block.

Example:

I found this example to be successful because it builds a very clear argument in an engaging way that shows she has the credibility to be speaking on the topic. Using terminology like "lip gloss ceiling" shows that she has engaged with the topic she is speaking about and that she is, as a result, credible. Also, the way that she mounts to a pithy ending makes the piece engaging and shows personality. It is very clear and easy to understand the point she is making with her letter.

Example:

I found this example to be successful because it focuses on personal anecdotes and stories to make the letter engaging and also build her argument. It also shows how you can assert credibility through long term engagement with a subject as she does it by saying she's been a "65-year-old longtime Democrat". She also asserts a

claim that shows she is unknowing, which I want to emphasize is okay with letters to the editor. You don't have to have everything figured out; you can just share your thoughts and experiences.

Example:

I thought this was a good example because it shows the power of building value for your audience. In this letter, she is able to share her experience and credibility as a pastor and someone with depression and build that to sharing something helpful for anyone reading the piece. Her piece is, therefore, engaging because people feel like they can gain something from it, and it shows that she knows and is comfortable with her audience.

Conclusion

Overall, the key to a successful letter to the editor is a passion for the topic and awareness of the audience you are writing for. If you can meet these two criteria, then you can write a successful letter to the editor. I outlined five useful tips for meeting these criteria as well as provide examples that you can use to help you find

your footing as you develop your skills in writing these letters. But the crucial thing is to practice, so think about something you are passionate about start researching and start writing. It may take some time before you get your first letter to the editor published but keep writing and keep submitting and eventually your letter will be selected and published.

References

Grey, D. L., & Brown, T. R. (1970). Letters to the Editor: Hazy Reflections of Public Opinion.

Journalism Quarterly, 47(3), 450–471. https://doi.org/10.1177/107769907004700302

Letters to the Editor. (2017, June 5). Retrieved from

https://www.nytimes.com/section/opinion/letters

Marisa Torres da Silva (2012) Newsroom practices and letters-to-the-editor.

Journalism Practice, 6(2), 250-263, DOI: 10.1080/17512786.2011.629124

Raeymaeckers, K. (2005). Letters to the

Editor: A Feedback Opportunity Turned into a

Marketing Tool: An Account of Selection and Editing Practices in the Flemish Daily Press. *European Journal of Communication,* 20(2), 199–221. https://doi.org/10.1177/0267323105052298

Rhetorical Patterns – Persuasion and Argument. (n.d.). Retrieved from

https://www.lincoln.edu/departments/languages-and-literature-department/rhetorical-patterns/rhetorical-patterns-persuasion

Write to Impress: A Guide for Chinese ESL Students on Personal Statements for College Applications

ARTHUR LI

Personal Statements as a Genre

Most higher education institutes require a personal statement from their applicants. Most students like you have

some experience in writing something that expresses your thoughts and experiences. However, a personal statement can be very different from a typical essay or paper you turn in to your teachers and professors.

First, we should talk about why colleges and universities want to see your personal statement. Even though Chinese students are known for their high grades and test scores, these numbers cannot really tell the administrator about who you really are. Yes, you are interested in Medicine. Okay, you've had a great internship. Oh, you also took a hundred AP classes. But, so what? There are also millions of other students who have similar numbers. All these numbers are simply a way to classify students into different score levels, but they do not highlight how you are different from others. Bekins, Huckin, and Kijak (yeah, I don't know too much about them neither) are three scholars who studied administration processes for students applying for medical school said in their research paper: "We're pretty certain from grade and test scores of an applicant's

abilities to succeed in med school. What we can't tell from grades and scores, though, is whether the applicant will thrive in a medical career. That's where the [personal statement] comes in." (p. 58) Ideally, you should participate in an interview, where you can really showcase yourself, as a unique individual.

But, wait! Don't forget you are very likely to be in China, attending those AP classes and laughing at math skills of American students. So, forcing the admissions staff to hear your story in person is a big no no. But what if you are in luck, and just happen to be in the States? Well, administrators would probably see your essays and personal statements before they ever meet you. So now, we have established why we should care about personal statements. They are the foundations from which others can learn about you and your values.

Hopefully, by now, I have sold you the idea that "personal statements are important". But even if I have failed you, you may want to read a bit further until the mailman comes and picks up this book

for return. Next, we are going to talk about what a personal statement is.

Technically, a personal statement "is classified as a type of 'occluded' promotional genre", (p. 137), as defined by Yuan-li Tiffany Chiu. In layman's, or normal people's, terms, it basically means you are writing something to sell yourself as a desirable talent. Chiu also claims there is a relationship between the students and administrators, where students are outsiders of the academic community, while academics are the insiders. Under this premise, administrators will hold some expectations in evaluating students. However, students, being the outsiders, can be completely unaware of such expectations. The difficulties raised by this unawareness is even more significant for forting students.

One opinion presented by Lucie Shuker is the view that:

> The personal statement, while not 'untrue', is nevertheless a fabricated account of the self – selected from many possible identity projections. The constant recording and

evidencing of productivity therefore result in the individual producing behaviours for the very purpose of being recorded and judged (p. 227).

Put it in an easier sentence, personal statements are not lies, but truth told in a decorated way, in order to make oneself more marketable. In the next four sections, I will take you step by step in exploring your most marketable stories and how to tell them properly.

Common Problems Experienced by Chinese Students

Since most Chinese students, like you, have studied English from an early age, mostly from first or third grade in elementary school, I do not need to explain basic grammar rules or lead you step-by-step in writing correct sentences. In fact, you may have a bigger vocabulary base than I do (considering all the words you were forced to remember for the TOEFL and the SAT). However, there are three main problems involving accuracy that I need to cover for you to write better papers and essays in general as a Chinese ESL student.

1. *Word Choice*

Even though China is possibly the largest English-learning nation in the world, only 7% of Chinese report "that they 'often' use the language" (Bolton & Graddol, 2012, p. 7). Most students have never had the chance to use the language in a natural setting. So while Chinese students, aiming to study abroad in an English-speaking country, generally have a large word base, they misuse many words in the wrong setting.

One common mistake is that Chinese students tend to use unnecessarily complicated words, if they can. For example, if one looks up "词汇量" in the most popular electronic Chinese-English dictionary, *Youdao Dictionary*, one would typically find a list of three words: *vocabulary, word base*, and *lexical resources*. Yes, it is nice to use words that no one understands, and idioms in your writing when you are writing in Chinese, because they simply look fancier. However, if you are trying to tell a very casual story, or even use it in a conversation you are recreating in a paper, no one, and I mean

it, uses "lexical resources" in their daily conversations. Moreover, "lexical resources" is a very different term from vocabulary and word base, as it normally entails such database created in combination of multiple dictionaries.

Another mistake regarding word choice is somewhat mentioned above, trying to translate Chinese idioms into English. One of more extreme examples is: "**人山人海**", which describes the large amount of people, being translated into *people mountain people sea*. Although many would be able to understand what it means, in formal writing, this type of misuse of language is not encouraged.

 2. *Grammar Mistakes*

Conjunctions are difficult for Chinese students because they entail a relationship between two ideas or objects. Due to the difference between two cultures, it can be incredibly difficult for students to use the correct conjunction. Some most notable mistakes are: "because" and "so", and "although" and "but". In the Chinese mindset, in order to transition from one

idea to another, one would need logical connection words between the two. For example, "Because I wanted to apply for American colleges, so I studied English". However, because conjunctions function not as mere transitions but also limited by its part of speech, there cannot be conjunctions in front of all independent clauses in a sentence.

The biggest mistake that Chinese students make with **verbs** is not changing the case according to its declension, especially in third-person present tense. It is extremely common to see an error in writing, such as:

He become the new leader for his group.

It is important for Chinese students to understand that, even though there is no tense-related declension in Chinese, it is extremely important to never forget that *-s* and *-es* when using third-person present tense.

3. *Structural Mistakes*

Chinese students tend to use such structure in wiring where they would

always start with something extremely broad that tends to scheme through the entire history of the human race. For example:

People have been trying to discover the true meaning of life since the beginning of humanities. Aristotle once said...

This is a typical opening of a piece of writing from a Chinese student. The cause might be their former education, as teachers instruct them to write and present the issue discussed more important and significant than they are. Or, it might just be students trying to follow whatever templet they have learned from language test training. After-all, I have remembered numerous quotes from famous philosophers, writers and scientists, just so I can use them when I'm writing in language tests.

A personal statement is a very unique style of writing as it is trying to sell you as a unique individual to the school and program that you desire. With that said, the best way to structure one's writing is to choose the one that best reflects one's personality, as well as to stand out from

over thousands of personal statements. If you don't feel as confident in writing in a free form, I would recommend you write in a similar style of lab reports. You should:

1. Provide background information on your topic.
2. Provide a description of what you did.
3. Showcase your accomplishment.
4. Discuss your takeaway and conclude.

Brainstorming

Coming up with initial ideas is the most significant step in the process of writing a personal statement. There are mainly two types of writers when writing personal statements, the ones who think they have nothing to write about, and the ones who think they have too much to write about. In this section, I instruct you on how to choose the right experience to write about and how to write about that experience.

Types of Experiences

In writing a personal statement, the best way to tell administrator who you are is to discuss it in terms of your own experience and use that story to entail your personality.

There are three main categories of stories one can tell:

1. Personal Experiences: This type of experience involves anything that you have experienced in your daily life. Significant changes, sudden realization, hard times, good times, family issues and so on.
2. Academic Experiences: This type of experience involves anything that you have experienced in your academic life. Deciding on your intended field of study, attending conferences, getting through a tough class, dealing with busy student life and such.
3. Professional Experiences: This type of experience involves anything that you have experienced in your professional life. Discovering your career goal, starting your business, internship experience, volunteer experience and so on.

What Is a Good Story to Tell?

After you choose an experience that you think is worthy of telling following the framework above, you can then evaluate

if it will benefit you in terms of marketing yourself.

The number one thing that you should consider is to try to focus on one key value or personality that you are trying to give impression to your school. Sometimes, students try to show schools with their full capacities in what is normally a 500-word essay. It is definitely not the most ideal way of writing a personal statement. With only about 500 words, one can barely talk about one event in detail, let alone covering others. You should try to only find one thing you can most reflect on from your story and that would most show your capacity as a student and a good fit for the program.

In her paper, Chiu showcased two criteria that administrators look for in a personal statement. One is "match" (p.141), meaning if you have shown your ability and capacity as a student to successfully engage and be part of the program. The other one is "fit" (p.142), which entails if the student is suitable for the program and that his or her values align with that of the program and school. For example, if you are trying

to apply for Wake Forest University's undergraduate degree, it might give you some extra boost if you write about your volunteer experience, since the school believes in the concept of "pro-humanitate".

To be more specific, I want to introduce you to some of the suggestions made by Shuker in her research paper. In the article, she presents us with four types of orientations: "Engagement, Focus, Time, and Classification". (Shuker, 2014) And she also introduces two takes on each orientation. Passive and active engagements, meaning if a person is taking an active role in the story, if one is following the crowd then he/she is categorized as passive. An internal focus paper reflects on self-reflection, while external gains comments from others. Retrospective vs Prospective just means if a person is actively marketing him/herself. In other words, if the outcome of your story is expected and planned, you are telling it in a prospective sense. Lastly, segregated and integrated classifications classify how dedicated a student is in turning his/her

life in favor of future career or academic goals.

Here is a table I've made for you to look at in case if you find Shuker's suggestions valuable and which orientations she seemed to like the most:

Table 1. Shuker's Preference of Orientations

	Engagement	Focus	Time	Classificatio
Okay	Passive	Internal	Retrospective	Segregated
Better	Active	External	Prospective	Integrated

You should use her suggestions of how and what to include in a personal statement as a guideline of how you should tell your story and how to shape your story in such a way that will help you market yourself as a desirable student for institutions.

Exercises

The most important exercise for preparation for writing a personal statement is to write short stories. These short stories should serve as experiments to find your own way of telling stories and engaging with the audience. You should

take your time and write several different versions of one story, then compare which way fits best with your designated value that you want to show to administrators.

In this exercise, you should write at least one story from all three categories I have introduced to you above. From these three stories, you should try to write at least 3 versions of each in under 200 words.

Portfolio and Finalization of Your Personal Statement

You should be able to construct your own portfolio of three essays, each around or under 500 words. Choose from the best story from each of the three categories. Use these three essays in your future personal statement writing, and, if you are confident enough, use them as your personal statements. Here is a final checklist you should look at before you submit your personal statements to your dream school:

- ∂ Grammar Check
- ∂ Word Check
- ∂ Structure Check
- ∂ Story Check

- ∂ Orientation Check
- ∂ Proofreading
- ∂ Reading the statement out loud

Now, you are fully prepared for submitting your personal statement to your dream school and go get that offer!

References

Bolton, K., & Graddol, D. (2012). English in China today. *English Today*, *28*(3), 3–9.

Chiu, Y. T. (2019) 'It's a match, but is it a good fit?': admissions tutors' evaluation of personal

statements for PhD study. *Oxford Review of Education,* 45(1), 136-150.

Ding, H. (2007). Genre analysis of personal statements: Analysis of moves in application essays

to medical and dental schools. *English for Specific Purposes*, *26*(3), 368–392.

Jones, S. (2013). "Ensure That You Stand Out from the Crowd": A Corpus-Based Analysis of

Personal Statements according to Applicants' School Type. *Comparative Education Review*, *57*(3), 397–423.

Khan, Q. (2019, April 18). China's

Education Industry On The Rise, And This Is Just The

Beginning. Retrieved December 5, 2019, from https://equalocean.com/education/20190418-chinas-education-industry-on-the-rise-and-this-is-just-the-beginning.

Li, Y., & Deng, L. (2019). I am what I have written: A case study of identity construction in and

through personal statement writing. *Journal of English for Academic Purposes*, *37*, 70–87.

Shuker, L. (2014) 'It'll look good on your personal statement': self-marketing amongst

university applicants in the United Kingdom. *British Journal of Sociology of Education*, 35:2, 224-243.

Trends in the Chinese Education Industry: Deloitte China: Global Chinese Services Group.

(2016, May 5). Retrieved December 5, 2019, from https://www2.deloitte.com/cn/en/pages/international-business-support/articles/trends-in-the-chinese-education-industry.html.

Writing a Professional Email: A Guide for Young Professionals and Academics

ALYSSA KLIER

Knowing how to write a professional email is essential for young professionals and academics in order to be able to present a good image of themselves and be able to effectively correspond with those in higher authority positions. Professional emails have become ubiquitous due to the increased prevalence of emailing as the most quick and efficient mode of communication in the workplace (Baron, 1998), therefore, it is important to be able to

know how to craft one because inevitably everyone will have to write a professional email at one point in their education or career. These emails are constantly being sent for eclectic context-dependent reasons. In general, writing a professional email mirrors the style of a letter due to its main components: greetings, body, and a closing (Pérez-Sabater, 2012). Further, professional emails follow a formal register that calls for a pristine, error-free, and grammatically flawless body (Biesenbach-Lucas, 2007). The tight structural and grammatical components of the email are enforced to highlight and stress the formality and etiquette that is expected and required of professional correspondence. Therefore, it is vital that a well-crafted email maintain the correct level of appropriateness, professionalism, and clarity. Further, a professional email needs to be concise, but have a clear purpose that is either directly stated or asked.

This writing guide will acquaint you with how to successfully write a professional email. Further, this guide will remind you

of what needs to be included, this includes all of these components: subject line, greeting, a message, formal register, and a closing. The guide will provide an explanation of the purpose of these components, how they should be done, and examples of how to use these parts within context.

The Subject Line

What purpose does it serve?

The subject line of an email is the one line of an email that the receiver gets to view in their inbox when they receive an email. The subject line describes the overall message, reason, and goal for sending an email. It is a short phrase or brief sentence that succinctly allows for a quick synopsis of the email for the receiver to know exactly what to expect of the email content wise. Further, the brevity of the subject line allows for the receiver to be able to remember the email's purpose more easily as well as be able to locate the email in general since the subject line can be looked for within the search function of the inbox. This part of an email is vital because it can make the difference in

whether or not an email gets opened or deleted by the professional receiving it.

How should it be done?

First you should really think about what the actual purpose is overall within your email. Use this purpose to summarize the email's content with what you feel as though really hones in on what you are trying to get across within the email and what you are trying to get out of the email. Write this idea down briefly in your own words.

Second, once you have your written summary, aim to cut this down from anywhere from two words to a brief sentence that thoroughly wraps up your main reason for sending the email. Try to avoid vague terms and cut them as well as filler words when they appear here. Instead use definitive, specific words that indicate what you are talking about explicitly. Further, avoid using greetings within the subject line; think of your subject line as a concise mini thesis for your email overall.

Then, once proper grammar mechanics and state your cut down, concise purpose for your email. Use necessary

capitalizations and punctuation. This can vary based on context. If you are using the more sentence-based approach use a capitalization just in your first word and end the phrase with the correct punctuation like you would in normal academic writing. If your subject line is more so a phrase, then capitalize at least the first word and use your best judgement whether or not to capitalize the other words in the subject line that follow the first word.

Examples of good and bad subject lines

Good Subjects Lines	Bad Subject Lines
"Merchandise Committee Application due by Friday November 23rd"	"Merch applications"
"Availability for Office Hours for Writing 212 Essay"	"Office Hours"
"Student Following Up on Public Relations Internship Application"	"Internship Follow Up"

Greetings

What purpose do they serve?

In professional emails, it is imperative to

always start with a greeting. The greeting is how you address and acknowledge the receiver of the email. The greeting shows that you are recognizing the receiver as another human being and that you are trying to form a connection. A greeting signifies friendliness, if there is no greeting then you will come across as informal or even slightly rude. The presence of a greeting will allow you to appear polished as well as it will help you foster a connection with your professional receiver.

How should it be done?

First, consider the relationship that you have with your receiver. Is the receiver someone you know outside of a professional setting? Is it someone that you have never met? Do you know their last name? Taking into consideration your relationship with the professional that you want to email will allow you to best be able to pick which particular greeting embodies the tone that you want to use in your greeting.

Second, maintain formality. Even if you know this person on a personal level, it is important to recognize that they are still

are a professional and thus they should always be greeted in a formal way like that of a letter.

Third, pick your greeting and pair it up with their formal name following it. Address the receiver by whichever pronoun they prefer, or their professional role followed by their last name. If the last name of the receiver is not known, then just use your selected greeting and follow it up with their job title. Finally, following your greeting and address of the person's name or job title, use a comma to end the phrase. Here are some examples:

Examples of good and bad greetings

Good greetings	Bad greetings
Dear Mr/Ms/Mrs (Last name),	Hi,
Dear (Job title or team name), Dr./Profesor/Judge (Last name) ...,	Hello, Hey, (First name),

The Message
What purpose does it serve?
The message is the place where you are

able to craft your purpose and navigate your topic. This is the body of your email. There are three parts within the message of an email which include: the introduction, the purpose, and the pre-closing. In regard to the introduction, this is where you introduce yourself and your topic. For the purpose, this is where your message is explained fully and stated. The pre-closing is where you thank your receiver in order to prompt for a response.

How should it be done?

First, in the introduction, introduce yourself to the receiver. Who are you? What is your role or title? What is your relation to the receiver? Next, introduce your topic in a brief way. What does this message concern? What exactly is the topic? With these introductory items, concisely answer these questions in two to three sentences.

Second, in the purpose, allow the receiver to see specifically and in detail the purpose or reason for this message in intricate detail. What are you concerned about? What are the details surrounding your concern? In the purpose, you can

either write your purpose as a question or a statement to start but use this first sentence as a starting point to be able to elaborate on. Write this in detail, but in an efficient, to the point, and clear way.

Finally, in the pre-closing, it is important to express gratitude to your receiver while also catering your message in a way that encourages a follow up. It is necessary to thank your receiver for taking the time to read your email. This allows for you to take on a tone that allows the receiver to feel appreciated, which in return can wrap up the email nicely while also prompting the receiver to respond to your email more quickly and sufficiently. Adding these closing remarks that show politeness can help end the email's content on a good impression.

Here are some examples of good and bad email messages:

Good:

My name is Alyssa and I am the Historian and point contact for the Alpha Delta Pi I contacted you a few weeks ago about redoing the composite proof with the missing people on it and I know you said

it would be $450 for the new big one. I am wondering how much it would cost to do the new proof which includes small copies of the paper composite? The president and I wanted to clarify this with you in order for us to be able to successfully account for our budget and determine the best way to navigate this issue. I appreciate all of your help with this issue as well as with all the work that you and your company do for our chapter.

Bad:

I know I contacted you a few weeks ago about redoing the composite proof with the missing people on it and I know you said it would be $450 for the new big one. I am just wondering how much it would be to do the new proof and just get a few small copies of the paper ones ? The president and I just wanted to know so we can see budgeting wise which way to go about this issue. Thank you for your help!

Closing, Signature, and Credentials

What purpose does it serve?

The closing is the way that you sign off your email. Closings retain formality and are then followed by a signature that

includes your full name and credentials. In the signature, you state your name, your roles and titles, and your contact information. The closing and signature are the places where you can leave a lasting impression since it uses your name and credentials to finish off the email.

How should it be done?

First, pick a word or phrase for a closing that appropriately wraps up and closes off your email in a suitable way based on the nature of the email. Maintain formality and professional demeanor. Make sure to capitalize the first word if you choose a phrase. Follow this choice with a comma.

Second the signature, write both your first and last name to identify who you are in a formal tone. Make sure to capitalize both your first and last name to show formality. Then, for the credentials, underneath your name, list your roles and contact information. If you are a professional, your role typically includes the title of the job that you hold and the name of the company that you are working for underneath it. On the other hand, if you are a young academic, the

roles have various components. Typically, the first role includes your university name and the year that you are intending to graduate. Next, state your intended degree and major on one line with a line for your minors underneath it if applicable. The next line will include leadership positions that are held within organizations that you belong to or jobs that you hold on campus. For this particular part of the signature, keep it concise and do not use too many roles in this place. Try to choose one or two that are the most pertinent to you and hold the most authority. Finally, underneath your credentials, include your email, and if comfortable your cell phone number. Here are some examples of good and bad closings:

Examples of good and bad closings

Good closings	Bad closings
Regards,	Thank,
Sincerely,	Your friend,
Loyally,	Chat soon,
Thank you,	Warm Wishes,
Respectfully,	Peace,
Best,	

Formal register and the importance of editing

It is vital to maintain formality in professional emails in order to appear professional and respectful. It is important to make a good impression and have good decorum with professionals. In order to do this, it is necessary to use the best vocabulary choices, correct grammar and mechanics, politeness levels, and accommodation to lower status in comparison to the higher status of the professional (Biesenbach-Lucas, 2007). In order to thoroughly achieve this formal register, it is integral to edit your email for errors, which can include spelling and grammatical errors as well as typos. Proofreading and going through your

email to read it thoroughly while editing it along the way to remove errors is necessary in order to check for correctness. Editing and removing errors will help make a good impression while emails with mistakes in it indicate a lack of care. Further, it is important to make sure to use an appropriate email address that retains this formal register.

Your turn...

1. You just applied to the position of Sales Intern for the company Amazon. You have sent in all of your materials, but you want to make sure that they have received everything by the due date of December 1st. You do not know the name of the person you are emailing because the email given is a general company one. You want the company to know who you are, and you want to impress them...

2. You need to email English professor to set up an appointment with them to discuss the bad feedback you received on a rough draft. You are very upset, but you do not want it to show

through your language because you want to learn where in the draft you can improve upon for the final draft or for the future in general. Further, you want to ask the teacher specific questions during the appointment. Your professor has many students, so you want to give multiple free times and thank them for their time...

References

Albasheer, N. A. A. (2016). The Effect of Text Messaging on the English Language Aspects and

Communication. *International Journal of Language and Linguistics*, *3*(2), 13–29.

Babni, A. (2019). Computer-mediated communication and language education: Focus on

written communication. *I-Manager's Journal on English Language Teaching, 9*(1), 50-

58.

Baron, N. S. (1984). Computer mediated communication as a force in language change. *Visible*

Language, 18(2), 118.

Baron, N. S. (1998). Letters by phone or speech by other means: the linguistics of email.

Language & Communication, *18*(2), 133–170.

Biesenbach-Lucas, S. (2007). Students writing emails to faculty: An examination of e-politeness

among native and non-native speakers of English. *Language Learning & Technology*, *11*,

59–81.

Bushnell, C., Kemp, N., & Martin, F. H. (2011). Text-messaging practices and links to general

spelling skill: A study of Australian children. *Australian Journal of Educational &*

Developmental Psychology, *11*, 27–38.

How to Write a Professional Email. Indeed.com. (n.d.). Retrieved from https://www.indeed.com/career-advice/ career-development/how-to-write-a-professional-email

Kemp, N. (2010). Texting versus txtng: reading and writing text messages, and links with other

linguistic skills. *Writing Systems Research*, *2*(1), 53–71.

Pérez-Sabater, C. (2012). The Linguistics of Social Networking: A Study of Writing

Conventions on Facebook. *Linguistik Online*, *56*(6).

Snyder, I. (2005). *Page to screen: taking literacy into the electronic era*. London: Routledge.

Takayoshi, P. (1996). The shape of electronic writing: Evaluating and assessing computer

assisted writing processes and products. *Computers and Composition*, *13*(2), 245–257.

Foundational Guidelines for Mission Statement Writing at the University Level

DARBY DEUTSCH

Purpose and Use

Specifically, the treatment of mission statement writing as a constructed response task constitutes the university's proposed articulation of its general description, function and short-term / long-term objectives. Here, the underlying purpose and use of this action-oriented summary is to declare the goals and values that an organization will then serve to its audience. Beyond this, it is a way of

exemplifying how a university may stand out against its competitors. Therefore, it is important that these powerful statements of purpose make a declaration, take a stance, and stand for something important. In doing so, the assembled framework should emphasize the interests of alumni, government, businesses, students, and faculty.

Additionally, these descriptions of purpose in higher education may often be referenced as the guiding principles for navigating difficult conditions. As a result, these points of reference remind administrators of the direction in which the university is aiming for. This is important as these mission statements should be flexible enough that their enactment welcomes revisitation. As a measurable goal, the articulation of purpose in higher education should be evaluated and revised when necessary in the future.

Vision vs. Mission: A vision statement expresses what we want to do while a mission statement expresses how we get there.

Effectiveness

As each university defines their brand through the use of a mission statement, they are aiming to impose lasting values that extend far beyond their current state and practice. As readers engage with and interpret the presented verbiage, they will hopefully capture the intended essence of what is reflected in the university's objective.

This style of discourse employs powerful genre specific **actions verbs** to captivate the intended audience and convey the organization's framework. The following verbs can help create dynamic and visual images that inspire action:

advance	constitute	engage	instill	provide
aspire com mit	cultivate encoura ge	enhance embra ce	invest prom ote	strive unite

Mission statements often use verbs in the simple future tense. The tense is constructed as follows:

subject + **auxiliary** *will* + **main verb**

This construction refers to a time later than now, while expressing things that are

seemingly factual or certain. Trends suggest that this utilized tense may convey a message that will explain core values. Specifically, who they are and where they are going. For example, notice the use of the simple future tense in the University of Miami's mission: "**We will strive** to transform the world in positive ways through innovative education, impactful research and scholarship, and the translation of knowledge into solutions"

In the following mission statements from three different universities, notice how language is used, including **action verbs**, descriptive language, and terms to identify *community and relationships*.

Example Mission Statements

Wake Forest University Mission Statement:

Wake Forest is a distinctive university that combines a liberal arts core with graduate and professional schools and innovative research programs. The University **embraces** the teacher-scholar ideal, **prizing** personal interaction between students and faculty. It is a place where exceptional teaching, fundamental

research and discovery, and the engagement of faculty and students in the classroom and laboratory **are paramount**.

The University **continues to fulfill** its ideal of a more diverse learning community, **providing** students and example of the world they will be called upon to lead. The University **sustains** a vibrant residential community with a broad-based program of service and extracurricular activities. The University **recognizes** the benefits of intercollegiate athletics **conducted** with integrity and at the highest level.

Central to its mission, the University **believes** in the **development** of the whole person – intellectual, moral, spiritual and physical. From its rich religious heritage, Wake Forest **is committed to sustaining** an environment where vital beliefs and faith traditions can **engage** secular thought in a climate of academic freedom and an unfettered search for truth. The University **embraces** the challenges of religious pluralism.

While *national* in scope, the university has been **shaped** by a culture that is

distinctively *North Carolinia*n. This history **provides** it with a sense of place and *community responsibility*. In **extending** its reach, the University **has made a priority** of *international study* and *international understandin*g. Wake Forest **seeks** to be a place where a vibrant and diverse learning community **weds** knowledge, experiences and service that lift the human spirit.

In the final paragraph above, the mission statement promotes an inclusive, yet global identity.

The University of North Carolina Mission Statement

The University of North Carolina at Chapel Hill, the nation's first public university, **serves** *North Carolina,* the *United States*, and the *world* through teaching, research, and public service. We **embrace** an unwavering commitment to excellence as one of the *world's* great research universities.

Our mission is to **serve** as a center for research, scholarship, and creativity and to **teach** a diverse community of undergraduate, graduate, and professional

students to **become** the next generation of leaders. Through the efforts of our exceptional faculty and staff, and with generous support from North Carolina's citizens, we **invest** our knowledge and resources to **enhance** access to learning and to **foster** the success and prosperity of each rising generation. We also **extend** knowledge-based services and other resources of the University to the citizens of *North Carolina* and their institutions to **enhance** the quality of life for all people in the *State*.

With lux, libertas – light and liberty – as its founding principles, the University has **charted** a bold course of leading change to **improve** society and to **help solve** the *world's* greatest problems."

Notice how this statement plays to the interests of various groups.

The University of Miami Mission Statement:

We are **committed** to freedom of inquiry-the **freedom** to think, to **question**, to **criticize**, and to **dissent**. We will pursue excellence in our research and educational missions with the single-mindedness that

marks great commitments. We will prepare our students for rewarding lifelong careers and will instill in them a continued and permanent dedication to the search for knowledge and the search for truth. We will provide them with the foundations for *ethical citizenship and service to others*, a respect for differences among people, and a commitment to high standards of thought and communication. We will provide service to our *community* and *beyond*, including the delivery of high-quality, compassionate care through an academic health system. We will strive to **transform** the *world* in positive ways through innovative education, impactful research and scholarship, and the translation of knowledge into solutions.

Founded in 1925 by a group of Miami citizens who **believed** that an institution of higher learning was necessary for the development of their young and growing community, the University has **matured** into a major research university and academic health system. **Located** within one of the most dynamic and *multicultural* cities in the world, the University is a

distinctive *community* with a variety of races, ethnicities, customs, genders, and faiths. Its geographic location uniquely **positions** the University to be both *local and global* in outlook and outreach.

We **aspire** at the University of Miami: to be a *global* university with an intentionally hemispheric strategy, **pursuing** inclusive engagement as a bridge across the Americas to the rest of the *world*; to be an excellent university, **striving** to **achieve** the highest standards of performance in every aspect of our work; to be a relevant university, **connecting** scholarship to *real-world* solutions; and to be an exemplary university, **offering** a model to society through the steadfast achievement of our mission.

This statement uses the simple future verb tense repeatedly in its opening paragraph. Also note in the final paragraph the intent to measure the effectiveness of their mission.

Aspects of Effective Mission Statements (Checklist!)

- Written with clarity
- Provide institution's uniqueness,

purpose & methodology
- Answers "What? – by when?"
- Action-oriented statement
- Measurable / evolves with time
- Maintains a degree of flexibility
- Emphasize interests of alumni, government, business, students, and faculty

Think about this! What do mission statements say about the vision and expectations that our colleges and universities adhere to in undergraduate education? What do they say about the goals that are held for student learning in contemporary, globalized society?

Beware!

Higher education mission statements should define, not limit, the campus focus (Donachie). Specifically, these goals should outline the focused potential without limiting the demands too narrowly. Meaning, it is important to maintain a degree of flexibility in order to "help schools navigate difficult economic and external conditions . . . [and] help administrators feel emboldened to steer the institution in ways that are helpful rather than harmful for its long-term

strength" (Free, as cited in Donachie). By avoiding constraint and welcoming future growth, administrators can pursue decisions that enhance ensuing viability.

For example:

We **are committed** to freedom of inquiry – the freedom to think, to question, to criticize, and to dissent. We will **pursue** *excellence* in our research and educational mission with the single-mindedness that **marks** *great* commitments. We will **prepare** our students for *rewarding lifelong* careers and will **instill** in them a *continued* and *permanent dedication* to search for knowledge and the search for truth (University of Miami).

Think Twice

Amending mission statements may introduce new issues to campus life. It is paramount that institutions affirm that their current proclamations are adequately upheld. In part of such values, students will often make the decision to attend the university (or not). Therefore, if the outlined principles are lacking, their credibility will become tainted.

In fact, many campus protests have

emanated from the false claims that university's market in their mission statements. When administrators in higher education claim to value diversity and inclusion, their actions that then ensue should validate their declaration. Yet, many students report that their living and learning community lack these values in practice. Specifically, College Pulse's 'Student Discrimination' survey engaged with more than twelve hundred students across eight hundred four-year institutions. These students were asked to respond to a variety of questions that aimed to gain access to their perception of campus climate. Of these surveyed, "64 percent of student say there is 'a lot' or 'some' discrimination" evident at their institution (Gottschling). This finding certifies that there is a misalignment between the objectives of an institution and the resulting practice.

Recently, students protested Albany State University's mission statement after its revision. This Historically Black College and University (HBCU) was forced to merge with Darton State College – a

predominantly white university (Lynch). Still operating under Albany's visual representation, students were astonished when changes to their school's mission statement omitted their status and roots of being an HBCU. Most of the student body chose to attend Albany State University because of their rich history and cultural significance; however, after the stark change in their campus' mission statement, they felt as if their school was being taken away from them. Campus wide walkouts and protests occurred almost immediately. The point of this is to remind institutions of the ways in which their mission statement can affect their student body.

Practice

Let's practice! In the space below draft your university's goals and objectives. Here it is beneficial to articulate both *internal* and *external* motivations.

For reference, *internal* objectives should be outlined to guide the decision making of university officials / administrators. These desires should aim to define the focus and future direction of the

institution. Next, *external* aims will generally extend the [university's] personality beyond its physical walls (Madden). This aspect should resonate with the students, parents & alumni that engage with the mission statement. In other words, this aspect should distill a strong sense of identity.

"In organizations, both public and private, mission statements are prepared to serve as a point of reference that helps describe the organization's purpose, uniqueness, and methodology" (Cox, 1996).

Works Cited

Gaff, Jerry, and Jack Meacham. "Learning Goals in Mission Statements: Implications for

Educational Leadership." Association of American Colleges & Universities, 17 Dec. 2014. aacu.org/publications-research/periodicals/learning-goals-mission-statements-implications-educational.

Gottschling, Grace. "New Survey Reveals College Diversity, Inclusion Efforts Fail Miserably."

Campus Reform, 4 June 2019, www.campusreform.org/?ID=13290.

Hull, Patrick. "Answer 4 Questions to Get a Great Mission Statement." Forbes, Forbes Magazine, 14 Jan. 2014, www.forbes.com/sites/patrickhull/2013/01/10/answer-4-questions-to-get-a-great-mission-statement/#cc3443a67f57.

Lynch, Matthew. "Students Protest Albany State's New Mission Statement." The Edvocate, 15 Jan. 2017, www.theedadvocate.org/students-protest-albany-states-new-mission-statement/.

Madden, Susanne. "Writing an Actionable Mission Statement." Physicians Practice, 13 Sept. 2011, www.physicianspractice.com/writing-actionable-mission-statement.

Wang, Jinhao, et al. "Thematic Differences in Mission Statement Between Four-Year Public Institutions and Two-Year Colleges in Texas." Texas A&M University , 2017, files.eric.ed.gov/fulltext/EJ987299.pdf.

How To Write A Presidential Speech

KATIE KATIE

The Importance of a Presidential Speech

Presidential speeches have been a prevalent and important part of our country's society and culture since Washington's inauguration in April of 1789 in which the first inaugural address, and presidential speech in general, was delivered. Since then, we as a country have beared witness to countless presidential and political speeches. Some have been moving, some inspirational and motivating, some heartbreaking and tear-jerking. Others have made us cringe out of anger, fear, or disappointment. Some have simply fallen flat, having been described as boring or awkward or unsettling.

Many presidential speeches are remembered and regarded to this day,

despite how many decades or centuries ago they were delivered. Often, we remember and reflect on those which were the most special and important. But, in some cases the horribly written or delivered ones stick out in our minds, too. This writing guide is designed, in part, for those presidential or politician candidates and hopefuls to use as a tool to ensure their own speeches will be remembered and reflected on for years to come, for their positive messages and audience responses, not the opposite.

If you are not or do not plan to be a politician or president, do not stop reading! This guide is also written with the average person, even one with little to no political ties or aspirations, in mind. Public speech is a large aspect and topic of discussion in our society, one that has become critical to the presidential process. As such, many of us may be fascinated by and curious about the process of constructing and delivering a successful presidential speech. This guide will convey all of this information via data and analyses of previous both renowned and failed presidential

speeches, deductions of what it was that made them so great or so catastrophic, syntheses of expert research and findings on the topic, and more. It does so in a casual, easy-to-follow tone, further making it a read for all.

Another reason this guide is applicable to everyone is because the speech-making tips and techniques shared throughout the text are true for not just political speech, but any form. Everyone has to deliver pitches, speeches, or presentations at some point in their lives or careers. The conclusion section emphasizes how the information and advice shared in this guide can apply to and help with all other forms of speech writing and delivering. With all of this in mind, this guide is meant for truly anyone who wants to take the time to read and be informed.

Goals of the Speech

Presidential speeches have become increasingly important over time as a means to connect with and appeal to the people in order to articulate and drive forward presidential goals, deliver or reflect on tragic or positive news, and more. As

Teten put it in his study, "speeches are the core of the modern presidency" (334). He finds that while "in the past, speechmaking, as well as public appeal in the content of speeches, was not only infrequent but discouraged due to precedent and technology," today it is one of the most important and most frequently utilized presidential tools (Teten, 334). Allison Mcnearney states that "even in an age of Twitter, the formal, spoken word from the White House carries great weight and can move, anger or inspire at home and around the world." These findings make perfecting this method of communication with the people even more crucial to master. One part of doing so requires keeping in mind what the main, general goals of these speeches are.

Connection to Audience

While presidents and politicians deliver many different types of speeches which often have contrasting tones and messages depending on the occasion, there is always an exigence for politicians to make efforts to connect with their

audience. This in turn results in a more positive audience perception and reaction to both the president and his speech. Later in the guide, specific rhetorical and linguistic strategies and moves will be discussed which have proven effective in fostering a connection with audience members through speech.

This overall notion of establishing connection works to break down barriers and make the audience feel more comfortable with and trusting of the speech giver. McNearney points to FDR as a president who successfully connected with the people, largely, she claims, through his fireside chats. The fireside chats exemplified a president making use of the media for the first time "to present a very carefully crafted message that was unfiltered and unchallenged by the press" (McNearney). Today, we often see our presidents use Twitter as a media avenue to connect and present their "unfiltered" version of a policy or goal.

Lasting Message

Another central and overarching goal presidents and politicians should keep in

mind when writing and delivering a speech is to make it lasting and memorable. It is challenging to predict what exactly will resonate with people in a way that makes a speech long remembered. Many of the various rhetorical and linguistic techniques outlined in section III have helped former presidents deliver speeches that have become known as some of "the greats."

Sometimes it is a matter of taking risks with a speech. Martin Luther King and Barack Obama are among some of the most powerful speech-givers our country has seen. Both men took risks in many of their speeches. Mcnearney points to Obama's "A More Perfect Union" speech as being "risky" in its focus and discussion on racial tensions in the country, an often avoided or untouched conversation. But, the speech was well-received and well-remembered, proving this risk was worth it.

What to Do: Rhetorical and Linguistic Moves

A conjunction of previous findings from various scholars and my own research

make up this section to portray the effective rhetorical and linguistic strategies that have been employed in successful presidential speech.

Emotive Language

In section II one of the central goals discussed in a presidential speech is to appeal to one's audience . An effective way to do so is through emotive language and general emotional appeal. In their study, Erisen et al. note the value of "strik[ing] an emotional chord with the public" as a means to gain public support, increase public awareness, and overall aid presidents in pursuing their political agendas (469). They work to prove the effectiveness of this strategy through an analysis of an Obama speech, delivered during a time of growing economic crisis in the country.

Erisen et al. identify Obama's implementation of both emotional and optimistic tones as rhetorical moves to connect with and appeal to his audience of constituents. The success of his use of emotionally-related rhetorical strategies are evident findings that came out of a

survey that "reported that 68% of speech-watchers had a 'positive reaction' and that 85% felt 'more optimistic' about the direction the country was heading" (Erisen et al., 470). Stewart et al. also find that "more emotionally evocative messages… lead to higher levels of affective response by viewers" (125). This clear data indicates the power connecting with an audience through emotion can have on their response and future outlook.

Optimistic Tone

Along with Obama's "optimistic tone" described above, others have employed what has been described as both hopeful and reassuring tones as rhetorical moves to appeal to an audience. Two of the ten "most important modern presidential speeches," as selected by the nonpartisan affiliated scholars of the University of Virginia's Miller Center, are JFK's address on the space effort and FDR's first inaugural address (McNearney). JFK's address was successful and well-received because of the hopeful tone he employs when discussing the goal to land a man on the moon. He gave the people an

optimistic perspective on this lofty goal, making "Americans feel like there was nothing we couldn't do" (McNearney). In his inaugural address, Roosevelt too pairs bold claims with optimism and reassurance to his audience.

Inclusive Language

Another found strategy utilized by presidents to appeal to their audience through speech is the use of inclusive language. In Teten's study, he looks at the use of the words "we" and "our", specifically, in presidential State of the Union Addressesses over time. His findings revealed a steady increase in these words within the speeches over time. The usage of these "public address and inclusion words" create an appeal with presidents' audiences because they help presidents in creating "an imagined community in which the president and his listeners coexist on a level plane (Teten, 339-342). These findings illustrate the importance of not presenting oneself as an omnipotent power and leader, but rather a normal citizen of the country like all of those watching. Identifying oneself with the

audience this way breaks down any barriers present.

Persuasive Language

Persuasion is another often-used rhetorical strategy, especially during presidential campaigns. In their study about "language intensity," Clementson et al. look at the use of "persuasive language" as a strategy presidential candidates employ during their campaigns. They assert that "candidates seem to vary their language as they try to persuade audiences to perceive them favorably" (Clementson et al., 592). In referring to this persuasive rhetorical strategy, they utilize the term "problem-solution structure" as one which is often well-received by an audience. People appreciate hearing exactly how a president or presidential candidate plans to fix a problem at hand.

What Not to Do

As stated earlier, while there are many speeches that are excellently written and delivered, there, too, are many speeches that flop. Alexander Meddings wrote an article which spotlights a number of political speeches which he deems some

of the "worst" in modern history. In comparing what makes a good versus a bad speech he asserts that "a bad speech must, by definition, be flat, garbled and publicly damaging either for the speaker or for the cause they're seeking to promote" (Meddings). In looking at some of the characteristics that make up some of the "worst" speeches, this section will highlight what *not* to do in the process of working to compose and deliver a successful speech.

Length

The research demonstrates that length of speech actually proves very important. In Teten's study, in addition to looking at inclusive language over time in presidential State of the Union Addresses, he also graphically measured the length, specifically number of words, of the addresses across time. His results proved interesting. There was a rise in length of these speeches from the first one delivered to those delivered in the early 1900s and then there was a sudden and far drop. There was a movement around the time of the drop to make speeches more

concise, and it is clear, since they have remained much shorter as time has gone on, this choice was well-received.

Meddings alludes to this in his piece, describing both William Henry Harrison's presidential inaugural address and Andrew Johnson's vice-presidential inaugural address as some of the worst speeches, largely because of how dragged out they were. A very important aspect of speech-giving is capturing the audience's attention, and this cannot be accomplished through a lengthy, uninteresting oration.

Lying And/or Contradiction

Though it should be fairly obvious that one should not lie in a speech, for the consequences will be great, there have been a number of presidents and politicians who have done so. Regan, Clinton, and Trump are all among the presidents and politicians who have made false statements or promises within speeches. Though it is understandable that a politician would want to speak towards what he or she knows will resonate and appeal to the audience,

doing so in a false or manipulative way is not commendable and will lead to much greater backlash than just being honest.

Word Choice

Some politicians have been caught lying in speeches when trying to cover up a controversy or scandal. Though one should try to avoid any sort of controversy, a president or person in power has to expect to have to talk on some difficult or delicate topics. This is where careful word choice becomes vital. Often the way to ensure a speech is written eloquently, carefully, and inoffensively is through various rounds of editing from a number of different eyes.

In my own research, I constructed two corpora, one composed of a number of the said "best" presidential and political speeches, and one composed of some of the "worst." The word maps pulled from the corpora are given below. It is interesting and telling to note the words that appear most frequently in each.

Applications to All Forms of Speech-Giving

This guide should prove helpful for not only those looking to run for office, but for

everyone. The various strategies and techniques given within this guide are, for the most part, broad enough that they can be applied to any form of speech-giving or presenting. We will all have to give a speech, a toast, a presentation, and countless other forms of written or oral works in our lives. Refer to this guide when doing so.

In terms of political or presidential speech specifically, though, in a sense there is not a clear formula for how to write and deliver them. In studies looking at various different successful presidential speeches, orators, and speechwriters, it is clear they all have their own unique style and form that works for them. But, the tips provided in this guide will certainly work to help to create a proficient and successful political speech writer and orator.

Works Cited

Clementson, David E., Paola Pascual-Ferr, and Michael J. Beatty. "When does a Presidential

Candidate seem Presidential and

Trustworthy? Campaign Messages through the Lens of

Language Expectancy Theory." *Presidential Studies Quarterly*46.3 (2016): 592-617.

*ProQuest.*Web. 10 Dec. 2019.

Erisen, Cengiz, and José D. Villalotbos. "Exploring the Invocation of Emotion in Presidential

Speeches." *Contemporary Politics*, vol. 20, no. 4, 2014, pp. 469–488.,

doi:10.1080/13569775.2014.968472.

McNearney, Allison. "10 Modern Presidential Speeches Every American Should Know."

History.com, A&E Television Networks, 16 Feb. 2018, www.history.com/news/10-modern-presidential-speeches-every-american-should-know.

Meddings, Alexander. "The 8 Worst Speeches in Modern Political History."

HistoryCollection.co, 9 Nov. 2018, historycollection.co/8-worst-speeches-modern-political-history/7/.

Stewart, Patrick A., Bridget M. Waller, and James N. Schubert. "Presidential Speechmaking

Style: Emotional Response to Micro-Expressions of Facial Affect." *Motivation and Emotion*33.2 (2009): 125-35. *ProQuest.* Web. 1 Oct. 2019.

Teten, Ryan. "Evolution of the Modern Rhetorical Presidency: Presidential Presentation and

Development of the State of the Union Address." *Presidential Studies Quarterly* 33.2 (2003): 333-46. *ProQuest.* Web. 30 Sep. 2019.

A Guide to Writing Stand-Up Comedy

REESE MARKLAND

Standup comedy has become a major part of pop culture due to its broad appeal. Everyday people reference, imitate, and integrate components of their favorite comedy sets into their daily lives. Despite its widespread popularity and impact on social communications, however, few people actually perform stand-up comedy as a part of their daily routine, and fewer are able to convert everyday conversations into this mode of speech. The appeal of being able to perform stand-up sketches, or at the very least integrate components of stand-up comedy more skillfully into the retelling our own happenings to our peers, is huge—everyone loves a resident funny-

girl (or guy)–but often the barriers to 'becoming funnier' or actually performing a comedic set seem overwhelming. This guide serves to equip the reader with the tools necessary to convert everyday narratives into stand-up sets–or, at the very least, equip the reader to understand in greater depth the principles of comedy and specifically stand-up comedy that may be applicable to their lived experience.

Defining Stand-up Comedy and Classifying Humor

The first step in any attempt to utilize aspects of stand-up comedy in daily life is understanding what it is and what its key components are. Stand-up comedy can be strictly defined as an encounter with a single performer behaving comically and saying funny things to an audience, unsupported by props, setting, or costume (Mintz 1985). While this definition is limiting, it provides a good baseline definition on which to understand what stand-up comedy truly is. Another thing to consider is the distinctions in types of humor. While no stand-up set utilizes just

one type of humor, it is useful to consider the different categories of jokes when creating a well-balanced set. One stand-up comedian breaks down humor into the following genres (Satyal 2016):

1. Awkward
2. Dry/sarcastic
3. Clever/quick-witted
4. Obscure/absurd
5. Dark/black
6. Raunchy/blue
7. Campy/cheesy
8. Friendly
9. Goofy/slapstick

Considering which genre of humor is your target while creating punchlines will be crucial to the word choice and tone of voice used when creating and delivering lines. Further, knowing which genres you use most frequently can be important to consider when deciding which venues you will perform at and who your audience is.

Common Rhetorical Strategies within Stand-up

Rhetorical Strategy	Explanation
Re-incorporations	Reappearance of one element of a joke (typically not a punchline) in a stand up performers routine
Alliteration and Assonance	Used most often to be signposts/indicators of the punchline
Character Footing	Adoption of accents, mimicry of vocal attributes, and the creation of characters through vocal qualities. Typically associated with the quotation of a character in a narrative or the creation of a character in a narrative. Footing is the alignments we take to ourselves and others as expressed in our management of the production/reception of utterance.

Intonation	Performance specific technique; not part of the text of the joke; refers to the changes of pitch in their delivery. Serves as a key signpost to the completion of jokes, and as an invitation to laugh. There is often a contrast in tone between the principal stress in the sentence that sets up the joke and a principal stress in the punchline, typically taking the form of a fall in intonation followed by a rise

Generally speaking, how should I even start writing?

In the beginning stages of making a set (i.e., your collection of jokes from beginning to end), it is important to start with small concepts and build from there rather than thinking of the broader themes you would like to discuss or include. Once you have a concept to build off of, brainstorm images and emotions around the funny concept to come up with more jokes. Next, find a way to thread those jokes together harmoniously. Finally, figure out the pacing and timing of your presentation. One key is building from

funny concepts to the funniest concept, so as you come up with jokes consider restructuring your set at the end to see which order works best. Another key consideration in regard to timing is the strategy of compressing in which one joke quickly follows another, then another, then another; this strategy results in the build-up of laughter as the bit (aka a single joke or cluster of jokes) continues.

In order to get a better grasp of what these steps actually might look like, we will break this process down into its steps and use an example from a Jerry Seinfeld stand-up set.

1. Start with a concept
2. First, Seinfeld observes that people, when consoling others about the loss of a loved one, will say things like "at least he died doing something he loved"
3. He then points out the ridiculousness of this statement, saying it really would be better if he had died doing something he hated, so at least he got out of it

4. Next, he connects this concept to the next joke by saying it would be a wonderful thing if that person had died while cleaning a row of porta potties
5. Brainstorm images/emotions around the concept
6. Next, Seinfeld focused on images which conjured up the horror of the porta potty like

    1. The dread inspired by the hinges on the door
    2. The mental scarring and lack of sleep you get after witnessing its contents

    - The emotions you feel inside of it

1. Note: the key here is creating a sense of relatability
2. Thread your jokes together

Seinfeld here does a really nice job of connecting his jokes–the first joke here relates to the inherent humor in certain consolations while the second joke relates to the disgustingness of porta potties.

These are seemingly irrelevant to one another, but because he is able to connect the two by saying how certain tasks we as humans might rather die than do, it works (Zafarris 2019).

4. Close with a bang.

Closing can vary in terms of content, but whatever the case, you want to make sure that you close with something memorable, whether it is by revisiting an aspect of a previous joke or introducing a new one.

Putting it all together

If you want to see how these rhetorical strategies and general framework are used in an actual set, use the following link and see if you can identify some of the structural components identified. The link is a scene in Tim Hawkins' *That's the Worst*. Afterwards, reference the list below which indicates what times in the video different moves are employed to check what you picked up on and missed.

1. 0:05 – Introducing a concept
2. 0:37 – Brainstorming funny images

around that topic

3. 0:37- 0:54 – Compressing jokes back to back to back & Progressing from funny to funniest
4. 1:22 – Intonations
5. 2:00 – Reincorporation
6. 2:20 – Threading jokes together
7. 2:25 – Intonations
8. 3:47 – Close by revisiting a previous joke

Mastering the 5 Minute Comedy Set

The five-minute set is the go-to when you are first starting out with writing stand-up comedy. Most open mics do not offer more than five minutes on stage for any one performer, so especially if you are just starting out it is the set you want to master. Before proceeding, it is important that the terminology is clear:

1. Bit: an individual joke or small cluster of jokes surrounding the same topic
2. Chunk: several bits that all revolve around the same larger topic
3. Set: your collection of jokes, from beginning to end

So jokes make up bits, which make up chunks, which make up sets. And in this case, we are focusing on the five-minute set, which is typically comprised of about 2-3 chunks as a rule of thumb.

Step-by-step Outline to a Five-minute Set (Waithe 2019)

1. Opener
   1. A good idea is to start with something that introduces you personally
   2. Ideas:
      1. Visual attributes that stand out about you
      2. The bushiness of your eyebrows

   - The props you have with you

   1. The quality of your voice

2. Chunk 1
   1. This is your first topic. It is easiest to transition into another personal thing about you.
   2. Progression should be from funny

to funnier to funniest (bit 1, bit 2, bit 3)

3. Chunk 2

    1. This is your second topic. There does not need to be a segue between chunks, you can just start a new topic.
    2. Note: it is best that within each chunk, the bits flow nicely from one to another. So while Chunk 1 does not need to have a segue into Chunk 2, it is best that the bits that make up Chunk 1 have some sort of connection to one another and the same applies for those in Chunk 2.

4. Chunk 3
5. Topic can be related to an earlier topic, or not
6. Note: As mentioned in the Rhetorical Strategies section, one of the main strategies in stand-up is reincorporation (i.e. starting with one topic, then coming back to that topic or a related element of that topic later). This would be a good place to reincorporate.

7. Closer – can be any number of things:
8. Continuation of chunk 3
9. Could be a segue into a small Bit from chunk 3
10. Could be a "callback" aka a joke that has been said previously that was particularly funny
11. Could be a new, killer joke
12. Additional notes:
13. For a five-minute set, 2-3 chunks is the ideal
14. Build from funny to funniest within bits
15. Each chunk should last about 90 seconds to two minutes
16. Practice your set!

References:

Mintz, L. (1985). Standup Comedy as Social and Cultural Mediation. *American Quarterly, 37*(1),
71-80. doi:10.2307/2712763

Rutter, Jason. (2001). Rhetoric in Stand-up Comedy: Exploring Performer-Audience Interaction.
Stylistyka. X. 307-325.

Satyal, Rajiv. "Standup Comedy Devices:

The Biggest Traps in Writing & Performing Standup

 Comedy." *Medium*, Medium, 11 July 2016,

 Waithe, Elsa. "How to Put Together a Five-Minute Set." *GOLD Comedy*, 22 July 2019.

 Zafarris, Jess. "Jerry Seinfeld's 5-Step Comedy Writing Process." *Writer's Digest*, 13 May 2019.

Contemporary Folk Protest Music and You

JORDAN HOUSTON

In an article for the journal *Theory and Society*, Ron Eyerman and Scott Barretta state that the folk music revivals of the late 1930's and early 1960's were both influenced by and a response to the turbulent political landscapes of the time (Eyerman, R., & Barretta, S., 1996). It would be foolish then to produce a guide to writing a folk song without acknowledging the deep connections that folk music and protest music share, and nearly impossible to write a guide for the former without also in some way writing a guide for the latter. As I am only occasionally a fool, I shall not attempt to do so, and thus I present to you this guide on writing a folk (or at least folk-y) protest music.

But let's first take a step back. What is

folk music, what is protest music, and why should you care to learn about either?

When I say the term "folk music" in this guide, I will be referring to what is more precisely called "contemporary folk music," a genre that developed in the mid-20th century and was spearheaded by such figures as Bob Dylan, The Weavers, Pete Seeger, Joan Baez, Tom Paxton, both Woody and Arlo Guthrie, Phil Ochs, and the band Peter, Paul, and Mary. The genre used simple instrumentation (often consisting of just a singer and their guitar) and focused on populist and often political themes. Carol Pegg writes "During the 1960s, the term 'folk' came closer to its American usage of singer-songwriters, such as Bob Dylan, Joan Baez, Caroline Hester and Judy Collins, who accompanied themselves on acoustic guitars and performed some traditional material," (Pegg, C., 2001). Protest music takes many forms, but in the context of this guide the term "protest music," will refer specifically to the subgenre of politically charged and topical folk songs that developed during the same time.

On to the question of why you should care. Art has unique way of bringing people together, of expressing ideas not just rationally but emotionally, and of swaying hearts as well as minds. Folk is a beautiful genre, full of passion and relevance. What better way to convince others that your cause is just? What better way to create art that's truly impactful and meaningful? If you care at all about the state of the world, if you care at all about art and beauty and virtuosity, if you care at all about creating something that has meaning beyond yourself, or about putting into words the emotions and discontents that crowd your mind, then this guide is for you.

Folk music has declined in popularity since its second revival in the 1960's and 70's, but the lack of mainstream folk protest music does not diminish the popularity of the genre outside of traditional production contexts, especially on the internet. With that in mind, I still believe this guide to be relevant to the modern musician. I also intend this guide to be a stepping stone for those interested

in other genres of music as well. Folk music is a good introductory genre due to its accessibility, but has influenced many other genres, including pop and rock, and the lessons learned in this guide are readily transferrable to other musical contexts. Folk may be a dying genre, but its children are alive and well.

I will walk you briefly through the steps to creating an effective and competent folk protest song. Without further ado, let us begin.

Folk Protest Music and Its Relevance

It is almost a certainty that you have been exposed to folk protest music (or at the very least its culture), whether knowingly or unknowingly. If you have ever learned to sing "This Land is Your Land," or "Battle Hymn of the Republic," in elementary school, if you have ever spied a sticker that read: "This machine kills fascists," or if you have ever marveled at how Bob Dylan became a superstar musician with what can be most charitably described as a "unique," voice, then you have been touched by the influence of folk music.

The central tension of protest music is the balance between confronting political and topical themes and maintaining artistic vision. This tension is best demonstrated by an anecdote involving folk musicians Phil Ochs and Bob Dylan. The two (friends at the time) were sitting in a limousine together one day in 1965 when Ochs offered criticism of one of Dylan's recent songs. Dylan responded, "You're not a folk singer, you're a journalist" (Jones, Dylan, 2011). Ochs, who at times called himself "a singing journalist," (New York Times) would almost certainly have argued that these two labels were not mutually exclusive, had he not been promptly kicked out of the car.

The musician must take care to infuse a moderate amount of artistry in their songs. Too much artistry and the political point made by the song may be lost or misconstrued, too little artistry and the song is more akin to an opinion column than a work of art. A balance must be found, and the two goals of the piece (making a political statement and making a work of art) must be reconciled. You must

be at once a folk musician and a journalist, never wavering too far to either side.

It should be stated that very often folk musicians, rather than write their own songs, cover and interpret the songs of musicians that came before them. This is almost universally true, and some of the most popular folk songs ("This Land is Your Land," "Solidarity Forever," "John Brown's Body," "I Ain't Marching Anymore," "The Times They Are a-Changin'," and "The Last Thing on my Mind,") have been covered several times over the years by various artists. Dave Laing writes that:

The [1940's] revival was founded on song collecting and field recordings undertaken in the first decades of the 20th century by such figures as Carl Sandburg, John and Alan Lomax, and on the extensive musical repertory of such key source singers as Leadbelly and Woody Guthrie, along with early revivalists including Oscar Brand, Burl Ives and John Jacob Niles" (Laing, D., 2001).

While this guide acknowledges that fact, its focus will remain on original compositions. This is more characteristic of

later and younger folk music revivalists, as Laing points out:

The younger generation attracted to the Folk Music Revival in both sides of the Atlantic often had a more flexible attitude to issues of repertory. The revival spawned a large number of singer-songwriters who accompanied themselves on the acoustic guitar but had little in common with those concerned primarily to bear witness to the tradition (Laing, D., 2001).

Musical Conventions

The ballad is a dominant form in the genre of folk protest music. Ballads traditionally follow common meter (alternating lines of iambic tetrameter and iambic trimeter, usually with an ABAB or ABCB rhyme scheme) and often feature a refrain (repeated line at the end of a verse) or in some cases an entire chorus (Gahan, Bill, 2007). Ballads typically focus on a single person of interest and revolve around a pivotal event in that person's life, often their death. While songwriters and poets are allowed metrical freedom within the ballad, they will largely adhere to the standard practices of common meter. Due

to these particulars, ballads are most effective when they are focused on particularly impactful people and events, and are not typically used for more general songs. Examples of folk protest ballads include Tom Paxton's "Ballad of Spiro Agnew" and Phil Ochs's "Too Many Martyrs." The folk standards "John Brown's Body," and "Which Side Are You On," are also both written in ballad form.

Of course, there are plenty of folk protest songs that do not take the form of a ballad. In fact, some of the most famous folk protest songs of all time, such as Bob Dylan's "The Times They Are a-Changin'," are written outside of the ballad form. A great number (and I suspect the vast majority) of folk protest songs fall into the non-ballad category, which is the much more flexible than the at times constraining ballad category. As such, it allows the musician to tackle more general or broad topics. The sheer variety of forms and styles of songs possible makes a detailed description of song structure as it pertains to non-ballad folk songs somewhere between very difficult and

impossible, and so I shall not attempt to do so. A brief overview of the most popular song structures will however be provided.

The most common song structure is verse-chorus structure (Bell, Ed, 2019). This structure uses as its building blocks the verses (which change in lyrics but remain largely consistent in melody) and choruses (which remain largely consistent in both lyrics and melody). Verses largely serve to set up and contextualize the chorus, in which the point of the song is expressed more directly (Bell, Ed, 2019). The most basic form of song follows a Verse 1-Chorus-Verse 2-Chorus-Chorus structure. While variations of that style are also prevalent–featuring bridges, introductions, and pre-choruses–that simple pattern underlies most popular music today.

Another popular form, refrain form, substitutes the chorus for one or two lines of repeated lyrics that (unlike the chorus) don't differ significantly from the rest of the piece. This makes the refrain form ideal for more narratively driven songs (Bell, Ed, 2019).

A third popular form, AABA, utilizes two

contrasting sections (A and B) that are arranged in an AABA pattern. The A sections in AABA form songs are usually more direct and self-contained, contrasted with the figurative and expressive B sections (Bell, Ed, 2019). For the most part, folk music uses verse-chorus of refrain form, often with four-line verses rhyming in an ABCB pattern.

Folk music traditionally uses simple instrumentation, often consisting of just the singer and their guitar, however younger folk musicians who followed tradition much more loosely (Laing, D., 2001) drifted away from this convention as the movement (and especially figures like Bob Dylan and Phil Ochs) also moved away from current political topics and towards more popular themes. As the movement evolved, the newer artists began to use more rock and pop-inspired instrumentations, departing from the traditional singer-and-guitar format and moving towards more complex arrangements (Pegg, C., 2001). Debate sprung up within the movement regarding the validity of these new styles,

but, as I am no purist, I encourage the aspiring musician to do as they see fit.

Integrating Politics and Humor

When it comes to integrating politics into your music, the first step is choosing a topic. Folk protest music covers a variety of social and political topics, and this gives the musician great flexibility in composing their songs. Singers can choose contemporary issues or timeless ones, broad issues or narrow ones. Choosing contemporary, newslike topics is a double-edged sword. These topics will make a musician's song more relevant to their current audience, but have the negative side effect of dating the song, making it less relevant to future audiences. This can be remedied to an extent by updating the lyrics of your song to be continuously relevant.

As stated before, broad topics can be addressed, and in these cases the musician is allowed the freedom to not take an explicit stance and can shield themselves in a cloak of vagueness. Humor and sarcasm can also be effective tools, allowing the musician to get their

message across without sounding too "preachy".

Other examples include Paxton's "Buy a Gun for Your Son" and "Be A Sport Afghanistan" as well as Ochs' "Love Me, I'm A Liberal." In all of these songs, the singer assumes a persona and sarcastically supports the very policies that they despise, criticizing them through praise.

More serious topics and tones can be taken on as well, but as this guide has stated earlier, it is important that the musician maintains constant awareness of the balance between art and information.

Audience participation is another prevalent aspect of folk protest music. Some songs (like Country Joe and the Fish's *"I-Feel-Like-I'm-Fixin'-to-Die-Rag,")* encourage the audience to sing along with the musician, while others (like Paxton's "I'm Changing My Name to Chrysler,") feature a call-and-response relationship between the musician and audience. Both methods are effective in engaging the audience and bringing a performance to life.

Conclusion

This guide is by no means an exhaustive one, it merely seeks to provide the politically conscious with the tools they need to express themselves and tackle the subjects they are passionate about with some degree of virtuosity. While folk music has declined in popularity over the decades, the tradition of political music is still alive and well in other genres, especially rap and metal. Due to my personal lack of familiarity with the intricacies of these genres, as well as the accessibility of folk music (all one needs is a guitar, a voice, and a pen–and sometimes not even that much), I chose to center the guide on that particular genre, in the hopes that it will give a prospective musician the tools they need to take those first steps into song making.

Works Cited

Bell, E. "Anatomy of a Song: The Three Most Common Song Forms."

Musical U, Musical U, 12 Feb. 2019, musical-u.com/learn/anatomy-of-a-song-the-three-most-common-song-forms/.

Eyerman, R., & Barretta, S. (1996). From the 30s to the 60s: The Folk Music

Revival in the United States. *Theory and Society, 25*(4), 501-543. Retrieved from www.jstor.org/stable/657909

Gahan, B. "Ballad Measure in Print." *Ballad Measure in Print – UCSB*

English Broadside Ballad Archive, University of California at Santa Barbara, 2007, ebba.english.ucsb.edu/page/ballad-measure-in-print.

Jones, D. "Dylan Jones: 'Bob Dylan Once Kicked Phil Ochs out of His Car Saying."

The Independent, Independent Digital News and Media, 22 Oct. 2011, www.independent.co.uk/voices/ columnists/dylan-jones/dylan-jones-bob-dylan-once-kicked-phil-ochs-out-of-his-car-saying-yoursquore-not-a-folk-singer-y oure-2304327.htm

Laing, D. (2001). Folk Music Revival. *Grove Music Online*. Retrieved 2 Dec. 2019, from https://www.oxfordmusiconline.com/ grovemusic/view/10.1093/gmo/ 9781561592630.001.0001/ omo-9781561592630-e-0000046854.

Pegg, C. (2001). Folk music. *Grove Music Online*. Retrieved 21 Nov. 2019, from https://www.oxfordmusiconline.com/grovemusic/view/10.1093/gmo/9781561592630.001.0001/omo-9781561592630-e-0000009933.

"Phil Who Described Himself as a 'Singing Journalist'." *New York Times Crossword Answers*, New York Times, 12 Jan. 2018, newyorktimescrossword.net/phil-who-described-himself-as-a-singing-journalist.

Scientific Journalism: How to be Engaging (or at least not boring)

BLAKE JONES

Scientific journalism is not like typical journalism; the information in scientific journals are often relevant to a large group of people, whether its advancements in medicine, the spread of disease, major environmental shifts, or simply the discovery of a new bacteria, the list goes on and on. Other forms of journalism, such as political journalism, are usually not spreading information that has a direct impact on the people, unless the president

is getting impeached or something like that. Science journalists constantly juggle accuracy and precision with engagement. They get continuously criticized for leaving out information, exaggerating claims, or being boring. The solution to the accuracy dilemma is simple; don't make stuff up and give credit where it's due; it's not that complicated. The engagement issue, on the other hand, is a bit more complex. There are multiple ways science journalists can engage with their reader. The purpose of this guide is not to teach you how to be a science journalist, but to simply suggest ways to make your writing more engaging so that you can connect with your reader and effectively deliver the information without feeling like you have to exaggerate, fabricate, or alter the facts. And also, to not be so damn boring.

Ray Anderson's *Rhetoric and Science Journalism* (1970) elaborates on what it means to be engaging in scientific writing and why it is important. Anderson identifies this when quoting Hiller Kreighbaum, the author of *Science and the Mass Media* (1967). "'Taking a

specialized technical language or environment and translating it, with a minimum loss of meaning, into the speech of the intelligent laymen unversed in the particular jargon and hopefully, into the speech of the typical men in the street,'" this quote essentially consolidates what it means to be an effective science journalist (Kreighbaum 1967, as cited in Anderson, p. 359). Anderson took this idea and developed it into "finding the common ground" between the journalist, the topic, and the reader. (Anderson, 1970, p. 361). But how exactly is this done?

Hooking the Reader

Before you find the "common ground", you have to get your reader to actually want to read your article. This is done by hooking the reader. This is a simple concept that we were all taught in middle school, but if it's not done well, you'll lose your reader before they even know what you're writing about. No reader wants to open up a magazine or online article and see that the entire first paragraph is on the molecular details of how a bacterium has multiple open

reading frames on one gene so it can code for various lactate enzymes to fuel glycolytic metabolism. Your average reader would stop reading this article instantly; they're likely thinking they just opened the most recent textbook edition of *Genetics: From Genes to Genomes*.

You have to convince your reader to read your article. Pose an intriguing question. State a crazy fact. Introduce a dilemma. Do any of these things, but don't jump straight into the details of the science. A great example of hooking the reader is Jennifer Ackerman's (2012) "The Ultimate Social Network."

Researchers who study the friendly bacteria that live inside all of us are starting to sort out who is in charge — microbes or people? (p. 38).

Here, Ackerman opened her article by presenting an intriguing dilemma that leaves us wanting more. Notice how she doesn't dive straight into the science, but instead presents a clear, interesting and comprehensible hook. This lays the foundation and tone for the rest of the article, while also initiating a conversation.

Word Origin

Finding the common ground starts with word choice. If your reader can't understand a majority of your words; or they do understand but it takes time and is mentally taxing, then how are you ever going to be able to communicate valuable scientific information to them? Your writing most feel natural to the reader, and that starts with word origin.

Take a look at the table below. I want you to quickly glance at these columns of words and ask yourself which of these columns is easiest to interpret.

1	2	3
Scare	Frighten	Terrify
Kind	Generous	Magnanimous
Hate	Loathing	Antipathy
Anger	Rage	Consternation

2011, p. 31)

Now, look at the columns. As you can see, each column of words has a different origin.

Old English Core	Old French	Latin/Greek
Scare	Frighten	Terrify
Kind Hate Anger	Generous Loathing Rage	Magnanimous Antipathy Consternation

(Fahnestock, 2011, p. 31)

If you found that the old English core column was the easiest to interpret and came to you the quickest, then you're not alone. The words come from old English and old German, and they make up our core vocabulary, or the vocabulary that we use in everyday conversation (Fahnestock, 2011, p. 23-41). Old French tends to be a bit more difficult to interpret and words don't come quite as quickly, but the words do have an appealing aesthetic quality. The Latin and Greek words, on the other hand, are pretty gross. Not many people off the top of their heads know what the word "magnanimous" means, and virtually no one uses a word like that in everyday conversation. Your reader does not want to have to read your article with a dictionary beside them. Try to avoid words with Latin

and Greek origin; they will likely frustrate your reader and turn them off to your article.

Of course, this is science journalism, and nearly all scientific terms originate from Latin or Greek (Fahnestock, 2011, p. 23-41). You can't get rid of all of these words, especially important nouns, or you will significantly impair the accuracy. But you can get rid of unnecessary descriptive terms. Look at the two sentences below and think about which one feels more welcoming and is easier to understand.

Replication protein A (RPA) is a heterotrimeric, multi-functional protein that binds single-stranded DNA (ssDNA) and is essential for eukaryotic DNA metabolism (Daughdrill, 2001).

But soon after the body ramps up its production of T cells, it also starts producing so-called regulatory T cells, whose principal function seems to be to counteract the activity of the other, pro-inflammatory T cells (Ackerman, 2012, p. 42).

If you felt that the second sentence was easier to interpret, it is likely due to the fact

that the second sentence uses the old English core to connect ideas, while the first sentence has a heavy concentration of Latin and Greek terms. The use of old English core feels natural and is an excellent way to find the common ground with your reader. It makes the reader feel like you are having a conversation with them rather than lecturing at them.

Metaphor

One of the best ways to find the common ground and engage your reader is through metaphor (Fahnestock, 2011, p. 104-107). From my empirical study on Great Science journalism articles, I found that biology articles rely heavily on metaphors to explain dense complex biological processes and systems. If you find yourself writing on dense natural science topics that often require an understanding of complex processes, then metaphor is your best friend. Below is an example of an excellent metaphor in scientific journalism.

Over the eons the immune system has evolved numerous checks and balances that generally prevent it from becoming

either too aggressive (and attacking its own tissue) or too lax (and failing to recognize dangerous pathogens) (Ackerman, 2012, p. 42).

Here, Ackerman, a master of scientific metaphors, uses checks and balances to essentially explain how an immune system works. This is an incredible feat because entire textbooks have been written on the immune system; she essentially consolidated it to one metaphor. The government's system of checks and balances is well known *to the intelligent layman*, while the ends and outs of our immune system are not. Ackerman avoids getting into the dense details of how cells interact in our immune system while still explaining the function. Metaphors like these are essential for scientific journalism because they can make or break your reader's understanding of a concept. These metaphors also bring the wiring down, similarly to the use of the old English core, to find the common ground with your reader, and to allow them to engage with the topic.

Personal Experience

Another powerful way to find the common ground is to share a personal experience. Science tends to not be that personable, so, using personal experiences allows you to insert yourself into the topic to help develop a connection with your reader and to effectively deliver your message. This works because personal experiences suddenly make the topic very real and human, while also demonstrating to your reader that you have actually experienced the event you're writing about, not just read about it in textbooks. Sharing a personal experience builds trust with your reader; it makes them more inclined to listen to what you have to say, which is the point of scientific journalism to begin with. From the same empirical study on great scientific journalism, I also found that psychology articles rely heavily on personal experiences to introduce a topic. This was especially true on topics such as, mental health, to demonstrate that they had dealt with the topic firsthand by either discussing it with friends, discussing family members who had

experienced the issue, or their own personal engagement with it.

I attended a conference...[story about a chemist's son who has OCD and was not accommodated]...This anecdote provoked a startlingly sympathetic response around the table: most of us, it turned out, identified with the chemist's son (Groopman, 2000).

This example from Jerome Groopman's (2000) "The Doubting Disease" demonstrates how to appropriately use a personal anecdote to engage the reader. Groopman sharing his experience discussing OCD and relating it to himself establishes a strong connection with the reader. He is being somewhat vulnerable, but this makes him human which establishes the common ground with the reader.

Thoughts

These are just a few strategies that could be effective in engaging your reader. You don't have to use all of them, and not all of them are appropriate for specific moments in your article. If you write with these strategies mind, or simply writing

with the purpose to communicate with your reader, then you will deliver great scientific journalism.

Also, from the examples, it is clear that no scientific information was exaggerated or came off as misleading. It is entirely possible to be engaging without loss of accuracy. Remember who you're writing to, remember why you're writing, and remember why you think your reader deserves to know this information.

People have a right to know what is going on in the scientific world whether it is an advancement in medicine, a new epidemic, or even the discovery of a new microbe. It is your job as a scientific journalist to deliver this information accurately and effectively, so your reader has a true understanding of what is going on in this world. But for this to happen, the writing has to be accessible, and the common ground has to be found.

References

Ackerman, J. (2012). The Ultimate Social Network. *Scientific American*, 306(6), 36–43.

Anderson, R. L. (1970). Rhetoric and

Science Journalism. *Quarterly Journal of Speech*, *56*, 358-   368.

Daughdrill, G., Ackerman, J., Isern, N., Botuyan, M., Arrowsmith, C., Wold, M., & Lowry, D.

(2001). The weak interdomain coupling observed in the 70 kDa subunit of human replication protein A is unaffected by ssDNA binding. *Nucleic Acids Research*, 29(15), 3270–3276.

Fahnestock, J. (2013). *Rhetorical Style The Use of Language in Persuasion*. Oxford University Press.

Groopman, Jerome. (2000, April 10). The Doubting Disease. *The New Yorker*. Retrieved   from https://www.newyorker.com/magazine/ 2000/04/10/the-doubting-disease

Hartwell, L., Goldberg, M. L., Fischer, J. A., & Hood, L. (2018). *Genetics: from genes to genomes*. New York, NY: McGraw-Hill Education.

Krieghbaum, H. (1967). *Science and the Mass Media*.

Louis, A., & Nenkova, A. (n.d.). CATS: A Corpus for Analyzing the Text quality of Science

news articles. Retrieved from https://www.cis.upenn.edu/~nlp/corpora/scinewscorpus.html

Louis, A., & Nenkova, A. (2013). A corpus of science journalism for analyzing writing quality. *Dialogue & Discourse*, *3*(2), 87–117.