

Writing For Real

Terry Carter
Allen Pusey



*What is written without effort
is in general read without
pleasure*

— Samuel Johnson

Four Phases

Selecting

Reporting

Writing

Editing

Selecting

- Pick a story with purpose
- Craft a narrative that makes sense
- Choose a style that fits the story

Reporting

- Without reporting you have no facts.
- Without facts you have nothing to say.
- With nothing to say, you have nothing to write

Writing

- To inform
- To move
- To explain
- To entertain
- To present as much relevant truth as possible
- To be understood

Editing

- Keep the writer focused
- Above all, do no harm

Rules For Writers

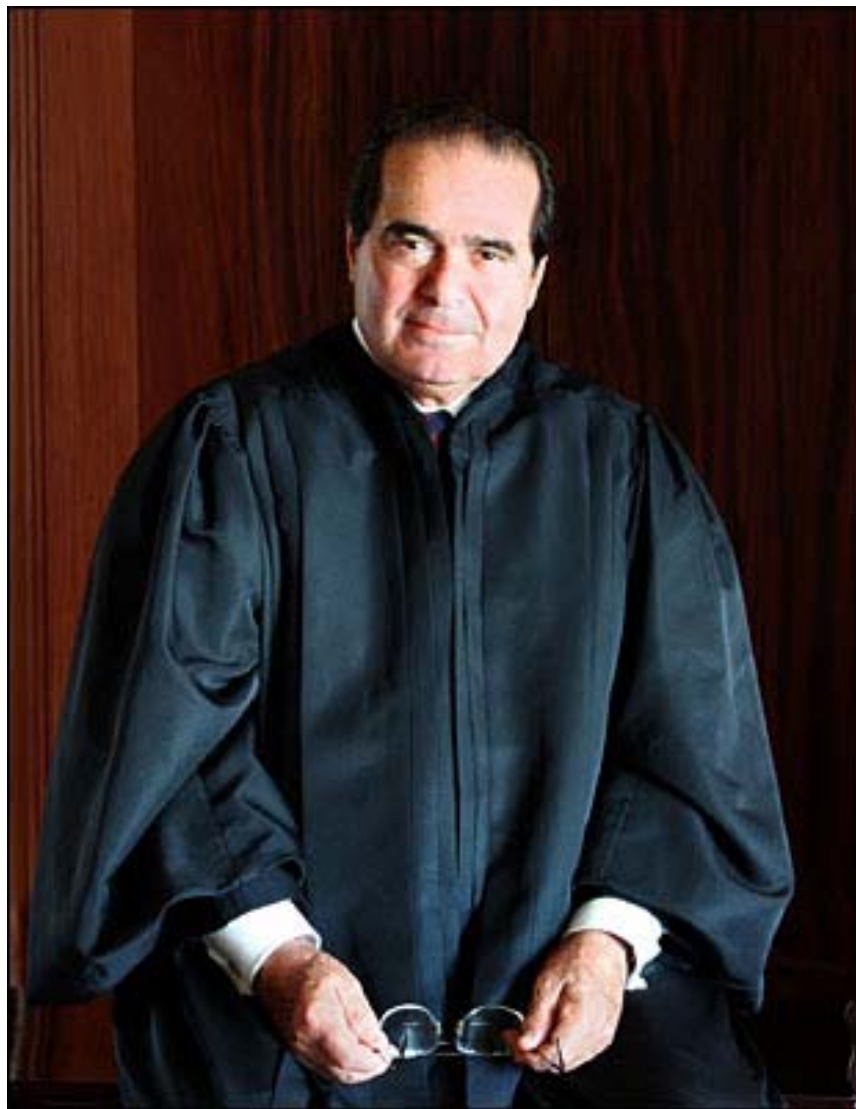
1. Know What You're Going To Say
2. Write Short Sentences
3. Avoid Gobbledygook and Jargon
4. Skip The Fancy Words
5. Get To The Point
6. When You Get To The Point, Stay There

How Lawyers Write:

The undersigned counsel do hereby for and on behalf of their clients, for the reasons explained herein below, respectfully request that this Honorable Court consider and hereby rule that no issues of material fact do exist in the instant controversy, and that a final judgment be entered in favor of the client of the undersigned counsel (sometimes herein referred to as "Defendant" or "Cross-Plaintiff") and against Plaintiff.

What They Were Trying To Say:

“Johnson requests entry of summary judgment.”



When Explanation Is Difficult:

Describe, Then Define

You are driving at night from Dallas to El Paso. Just past Midland, the horizon is dark and expansive. Voices on the radio are deeper and darker. Lights are few and far between.

Suddenly, you jerk in your seat with the realization that you have been asleep. It was probably only for a few seconds, but you have no way of knowing.

This is microsleap.

Personalize Expectations

For six years, Jeff Robnett and David Gibson were close friends.

Several times a week they got together and drank coffee - or something stronger - and they talked.

Being men, they talked about women. Being lawyers, they talked about judges. Being ambitious, they talked about someday becoming judges. David Gibson, running for county court at law bench, actually became one. Jeff Robnett, having run for a judgeship and lost, was still trying.

The talk between them stopped in July 2000, when Judge Gibson, 37, discovered that for 2 1/2 months, his friend had been taping their conversations at the behest of the FBI.

Absurdity

Max Soffar lives on death row, sentenced to die for the 1980 slaying of three youths in a Houston bowling alley stickup.

No forensic evidence - no murder weapon or fingerprints or fibers or blood samples - connected him to the gruesome robbery. No witness placed him at the scene.

He was convicted solely on statements made by a drug-addled confidential police informant facing prison for a series of petty crimes.

Unfortunately for Mr. Soffar, that drug-addled informant was Max Soffar himself.

Word Kill

- closure
- cobble together
- cusp
- empowerment
- got game
- litmus test
- mental toughness
- outside the box
- push the envelope
- raise the bar
- ramp up
- ratchet up
- rush to judgment
- 24-7

Being Edited

- Be Open To Suggestions That Make Your Story Better
- Don't Be Bullied/Don't Be A Bully
- Be Intellectually Honest

- 1) Write a catchy opener.
- 2) Distill the point in a “nut graph.”
- 3) Demonstrate subject’s importance.
- 4) Offer explanations for the subject.
- 5) Consult the experts.

6) Include the celebrity angle, if appropriate.

7) Return to the experiences of everyday people.

8) Explore grand theories.

9) Postulate even grander connections.

10) Find a humorous “kicker.”

Ten Things to Do Before This Article Is Finished

By ALEX WILLIAMS

1) Write a catchy opener.

“Zen has no goals,” according to a traditional koan. “It is always on its way.”

If so, Rachael Hubbard, a preschool teacher in Salem, Ore., will not be accompanying it. Ms. Hubbard has many goals -- 78, to be exact. And it is only by dutifully ticking them off, she said, that she has found her path toward enlightenment.

Two years ago Ms. Hubbard compiled what is known as a life list, a contract with herself enumerating dozens of goals she hoped to accomplish before she died (“build a house for Habitat for Humanity...Read “Pride and Prejudice,” etc.) and posted it online.

“I just felt like I was slowly getting older and was looking around saying, ‘Well, I haven’t really done a whole lot with my life yet,’” she recalled.

But once she began the journey prescribed by her list, it quickly became an addiction.

“Earn a master’s degree” (No. 5): check.

“See a dinosaur fossil” (No. 27): check.

2) Distill the point of this article in a “nut graph.”

Once the province of bird-watchers, mountain climbers and sufferers of obsessive-compulsive disorder, the life list has become widely popular with the harried masses, equal parts motivational self-help and escapist fantasy.

3) Demonstrate the popularity of life lists.

Evidence of the lists' surging popularity is all around. The travel writer Patricia Schultz currently has two "1,000 Places to See Before You Die" books lodged on The New York Times paperback advice best-seller list, two in an avalanche of recent life-list books, like "1001 Books You Must Read Before You Die" and "101 Things to Do Before You Turn 40."

4) Offer an explanation of the phenomenon.

And no wonder life lists are so ubiquitous. They are, proponents say, the perfect way for anxious time-crunched professionals to embark on spiritual quests in a productivity-obsessed age. The lists are results-oriented, quantifiable and relentlessly upbeat. If Aristotle were alive, he might envy the efficiency of a master list in which the messy search for meaning in life is boiled down to a simple grocery list: “get a tattoo,” “learn to surf.”

10) Find a humorous “kicker.”

Then again, some Americans lead lives too extraordinary to augment with a life list.

For his book, Mr. Zackham visited Hugh Hefner at the Playboy Mansion and asked him what he still hoped to experience.

“Nothing,” was Mr. Hefner’s answer to him.

“He said, ‘I honestly can’t think of anything I don’t already have.’”

Rules For Writers

1. Know What You're Going To Say
2. Write Short Sentences
3. Avoid Gobbledygook and Jargon
4. Skip The Fancy Words
5. Get To The Point
6. When You Get To The Point, Stay There