

## 10 Quick Tips for Better Business Writing

Writing is the wrangling of thoughts to page—it is an arduous process that seeks to bring abstract ideas into the tangible world.

Writing is valuable. It doesn't just transfer insights, it creates them. And since "good words are worth much and cost little," choosing the right words is worth the price you pay in time (and sanity).

At [Help Scout](#) we look at the quality of writing through the same demanding lens we use to evaluate the quality of code.

I certainly don't have this writing thing figured out—not even close—but thanks to the gracious feedback from readers, here are a few common signs that your writing is heading in the right direction:

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### 1. Brevity. Soul. Wit.

Few things drag down writing more than spreading good ideas over too many words.

### 2. Writing is not flaunting your vocabulary.

"When you write you should pretend that you, the writer, see something in the world that's interesting, that you are directing the attention of your reader to that thing in the world, and that you are doing so by means of conversation," says Harvard psychologist Steven Pinker. Writing is not meant to prove ownership of a thesaurus—it is the selective transcribing of thoughts.

### 3. On having your cake and eating it, too.

The best writing is that which pleases at a glance, but further rewards careful study. "A thoughtful list post" may seem like an oxymoron, but like a movie you can re-watch a dozen times, good writing hooks easily yet hides gifts for a discerning mind.

### 4. Don't bury the lede.

Before pen to page or fingers to keyboard, you must begin with knowing what you are trying to say. Every piece of writing should have the thesis, the value proposition, be entirely clear from the outset. The journey to the end of your essay should be

rewarding for reasons other than figuring out what point you're trying to make.

## **5. To write more 'Damn Good Sentences,' read them.**

In the book [How To Write a Sentence](#), *New York Times* columnist Stanley Fish laments that “many educators approach teaching the craft of writing a memorable sentence the wrong way — by relying on rules rather than examples.” Garbage in, garbage out; you'll produce better sentences if you dedicate time to reading them.

## **6. 'In other words,' you should have used other words.**

Insight is memorable when it can be embraced directly—don't pad it with “essentially,” “basically,” or “in other words.” Use the right words the first time.

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## **7. Don't tell people how to travel; show them your vacation photos.**

Grandstanding on topics you know little about makes you disingenuous—your deception oozes from every paragraph to an informed reader. Instead, hop off your soap box and don't preach, be the Sherpa; share what you've learned in an honest way. People love following a journey.

## **8. An idea is nothing without a reaction.**

Reactions are oxygen for writing. Until you get feedback on what you've said, your analysis can only reveal so much. Be prepared for critiques and criticism; great work is contingent on a willingness to be judged.

## **9. 'Just write' is tired advice, but still needed.**

If you're looking for a way to make hard work easy, you won't find it in writing. You'll struggle with the blank page until your ass falls off the chair—but until that day, keep sitting down and do the work.

## **10. Meandering endings can sour good writing; approach them quickly.**

I'll let Paul Graham handle this one: “Learn to recognize the approach of an ending, and when one appears, grab it.”

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