WRITING FOR [REDACTED]

What's it like to write for [REDACTED]? [REDACTED] is a full-service marketing agency. We tap news and trends in client industries to create great stories and user experiences. Your writing is part of that experience.

Write simply, inform readers fast, engage with the audience, and get them to click on anything other than *back*.

Be helpful by:

- Getting to know client blogs and web pages.

- Noting website buttons and interactive features.

- Adding links to other website pages within your text.

Businesses once kept their knowledge to themselves. Today's consumer, however, expects more, and they trust the businesses who deliver it. They want information, not advertisements; facts not opinions.

Sometimes our customers **don't know about our product or service** but find our content through search or social media.

- They are the [*top-of-funnel*](#) audience.

- Stories are crafted for a larger audience who are in the early stages of the buying process.

Sometimes our customers **need a product or service** like ours.

- This is *middle-of-funnel* crowd, who have a problem the client can fix.

- Those who have engaged with the client on some level -- visiting, subscribing, converting -- may also become mid-funnel.

Sometimes our customers **want to hear about our products** specifically.

- These are the *bottom-of-funnel* dwellers.

- They are comparing options and may already be considering us.

- When you're *this* close to a sale, it's finally time to start talking about *products*.

Our preferred style is simple and informative. This is no easy task. Plain, concise, communicative writing is always harder to create than complex, flowing, opaque prose.

Blog Writing Style Guide

Please peruse our style guide, along with the rest of the [REDACTED] media kit, and thank you for your efforts.

STYLE

Remember George Orwell's six rules from "Politics and the English Language":

1. *Never use a metaphor, simile or other figure of speech which you are used to seeing in print.*

2. *Never use a long word where a short one will do.*

3. *If it is possible to cut out a word, always cut it out.*

4. *Never use the passive where you can use the active.*

5. *Never use a foreign phrase, a scientific word or a jargon word if you can think of an everyday English equivalent.*

6. *Break any of these rules sooner than say anything outright barbarous.*

Be plain but not breezy. Not everything that comes to mind is worth writing down, especially if it feels "fun" or "easy" to write. The style should never seem as if it came off the top of someone's head, and it definitely shouldn't sound pleased with itself.

Plain writing need not be boring. Use short and simple sentences and keep non-standard constructions to a minimum. Avoid using multiple modifiers (e.g. "a warm, wet blanket) and double negatives (e.g. "There was nothing they couldn't do).

Be persuasive but not assertive. The larger the claim, the more proof it requires, the more some writers tend toward imprecision and superlative. Avoid making authoritative statements without citing authority.

Be exciting without using tricks. Avoid exclamation points, verbal play and formatting gimmicks that interrupt the reader to draw attention to certain words. "**Surprise, surprise** is more irritating than informative. So is **Ho, ho** and, in the middle of a sentence, **wait for it**, etc." (*The Economist Style Guide*)

Be authoritative but not authoritarian. Lead readers to the right conclusion without clubbing them over the head with it. Suggest, don't dictate. Make light use of words such as "ought," "should," and "must." Don't just tell them the *what*; explain the *why*.

Use of Adages & Common Phrases. Lazy writing is fun and easy. That's because certain common expressions commonly occur to writers without even thinking. But for every "window of opportunity," "flavor of the month," "kinder, gentler," "hearts and minds," "million-dollar question," or "twenty-something" "moving at the speed of thought," there are an infinite number of original phrases that can express an idea just as well or better.

Avoid referencing adages. If you're considering starting your story with one, think twice.

- E.g. The old saying goes that a bird in hand is worth two in the bush, but . . . .

- E.g. John Lennon once said "all you need is love."

Use of Idiom & Metaphor. Metaphors evoke visual images in the mind of the reader, but only if they have to think about them. Keep your metaphors original. Avoid familiar ones that no longer stir vivid imagery:

- E.g. "Iron will," "low-hanging fruit," "elephant in the room."

Idioms are metaphors that are so common, their meanings so well understood, that we no longer consider the connection.

- E.g. "Have your cake and eat it," "the whole nine yards," "catch-22."

Use of Imperative Mood. Much writing is prescriptive in nature, but readers should have the freedom to come to their own conclusions about what they should do.

- E.g. **Allow your employees** the option of opting out of your wellness program. They'll appreciate it.

Don't be bossy. Instead, give advice without telling people what to do.

- E.g. **Businesses that offer** the option of opting out of a wellness program have more appreciative employee.

Use of Qualifiers. This is *rather* obvious, but *pretty* essential, and *verily* it *goes without saying* that useless adjectives and qualifying phrases are *more than a little* distracting *pretty much* all of the time. We all get sucked into applying such literary leeches to our prosaic bodies, but we should each strive to do a *little* better.

Use of Jargon & Slang. Use slang conservatively and only if it improves the sentence. Avoid popular jargon and marketing speak.

- E.g. "Thumbs-up," "thumbs-down," "the bottom line," "key," "in today's modern society," etc.

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Use of Superlatives. Avoid exaggerated expressions and hyperbole.

- E.g. "leading," "best," "worst," "most," "least" -- just about anything ending in "-st."

Use of Nebulous Descriptors. Avoid using empty adjectives.

- E.g. "some," "not the most," "not the least," "a good number of."

Use of References. Use links or in-line citations to reference an information source.

- E.g. Nearly 10 million working-age **<u>Americans were unemployed in 2009</u>**.

- E.g. Nearly 10 million working-age Americans were unemployed in 2009 (**"Unemployment Rate - 16 years and over,"** *Labor Force Statistics from the Current Population Survey,* **Bureau of Labor Statistics, 2015).**

When these forms are not possible, reference the source in the text.

- E.g. Nearly 10 million working-age Americans were unemployed in 2009, **according to a survey from the Bureau of Labor Statistics, a U.S. government agency.**

Use of Quotes. Quote sparingly. Even when pulling from interview material, use direct quotes only if the speaker says something interesting and distinctive; otherwise, use concise paraphrasing.

Avoid surrounding words with quotes to add emphasis ("scare" quotes).

- E.g. Some **"teachers"** who travel overseas to conduct English courses aren't required to hold licenses.

Avoid quoting other secondary sources such as blogs or magazines merely to restate the information contained there. Paraphrase instead.

- E.g. The *New York Times* reported that the university president **"was stepping down after a wave of student outcry, including an ultimatum from dozens of football players."**

Do not quote popular opinion.

- E.g. Most people would say the shooting was **"tragic."**

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FORMATTING

Abbreviations. Unless using a familiar abbreviation (e.g. "UFO"), write the full name on the first appearance and put its its truncated form in parentheses:

- E.g. The **Affordable Care Act (ACA)** was passed in 2010.

Use the abbreviation sparingly throughout. Favor oblique references instead:

- E.g. Although passed in 2010, **the act** didn't go into effect until 2012.

Alignment. Articles are to be left-aligned.

Anchor Text. Words that link to other content should describe the source they lead to, as if those were the words you would use in a search engine to find it. Avoid hyperlinking individual words or numbers.

Boldface. Most people read what's in boldface before anything else. Use bold lettering to help readers quickly absorb and navigate content. Do not use it to add emphasis to individual words or phrases.

Bulleted and Numbered Lists. Lists can organize information better than almost any tool in your writing kit. Use them to break up long text and organize complex subjects:

- **Format:**
  - Generally, the points in a list follow a colon and do one of the following:
    - Complete the sentence that sets off the list.
    - Comprise a complete sentence of its own.
  - Capitalize the first letter and use a period for each list item.
- **Usage:**
  - **Numbered lists:** Use for step-by-step processes, to organize information by priority, or when citing a specific number of items before starting the list.
  - **Bulleted lists:** Use for listing points with no particular order or priority.

Citations. When citing a print resource (or a digital copy of one), use the following format: ({Author}, "{Article Name}," {*Publication Name*}, {Publisher Name}, {Publication Year}, {Page Number}).

> E.g. An object's mass increases as it approaches the center of a black hole **(Stephen W. Hawking,** *A Brief History of Time: From the Big Bang to Black Holes***, Bantam Books New York, 1988, p. 112).**

If referenced a second time, use an abbreviated citation.

> E.g. The extra mass is then "recycled" in the form of x-ray radiation **(Hawking,** *Brief History of Time***, p. 114).**

Dashes. It's OK to set off certain parenthetical phrases using dashes. Just use them sparingly.

- E.g. Lots of famous artists **-- Picasso, Van Gough and Morrissey, to name a few --** battled depression during their most creative periods.

Dates. Spell out the months and use numbers for the days. Avoid using ordinal numbers (e.g. "1st" or "30th"). Set off the year with commas.

- E.g. I was born on **October 15, 1989,** in Delray.

Set off the whole date with commas if it follows a day of the week.

- E.g. Your appointment is on **Thursday, January 25,** at noon.

Font. Articles should be submitted in Arial font.

Headings and Subheadings. Similar to anchor text, headings and subheadings are scanned for keywords by search engines. Eschew clever heading names and instead *write the main point of the section*.

If a visitor to your blog reads only one thing, it will be the headlines, the quality of which will often either draw readers in or make them bounce. Be witty and not trite; informative and not cryptic; original and not cliche.

Use bolded text. If it reads as a headline, use headline formatting rules for capitalization; but if it reads like a sentence, write it like one (capitalize the first letter and use a period). Be consistent: stick to one heading type where applicable.

If the title references a number (e.g. "9 Ways to Skin a Cat"), provide numbers for relevant headings in number-period format

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- E.g. "**1. Avoid the claws.**" "**2. Buy a good potato peeler.**" "**3. Scare it into jumping out of its skin.**"

Headlines. Use AP style guidelines. Capitalize all words in a headline except for articles (e.g. "a," "an," "the") and prepositions of three letters or fewer (e.g. "by, "for," "in"; but "About," "Inside," "With"). Use "%" instead of "percent." Use single quotation marks.

Italics. Use sparingly and only in the following circumstances:

- **For emphasis**: Try to avoid doing it unless the reader would be lost without it. Most words, phrases and sentences don't need italics to be understood.

- **For important terms**: If a particular word or concept is integral to the writing, it can be italicized in its first instance.

    - E.g. "This article will discuss the concept of ***rezoning.***"

- **For foreign words**: Unfamiliar words and phrases can throw readers if they don't know they're in a foreign language. Readers probably know what "mia culpa" means (Spanish for "my fault"), but probably not "*res ipsa loquitur*" (Latin for "the thing which speaks for itself"). If the word appears frequently, italicize the first instance only.

- **Other uses for italics**: Legal case names, mathematical variables, composition titles (E.g. *The New York Times*, *Pride & Prejudice*, and *Declaration of Independence*),

Links. When linking copy, avoid copy-pasting URLs into the body; instead, hyperlink the anchor text.

- E.g. In 1978, the [Revenue Act](#) created the first tax-deferred retirement savings plans.

When linking to internal resources, writers are encouraged to directly reference website pages within the text under to the relevant information using the following format: **RELATED: [{Linked Page Title Text}](#)**

- E.g. If the Baby Boom Generation is any indication, today's Millennials should start investing early.

    RELATED: [401k Withdrawals to Accelerate as More Boomers Retire](#)

Link to additional content offers following the conclusion.

- E.g. If you found this article helpful, may we suggest:

  - For more on **worker wellness**, read [10 Best Practices for Better Corporate Wellness](#).

  - For more on **motivating workers to succeed**, read [Motivational Theory: When Employee Perks Don't Work, Try Rewards and Recognition](#).

  - For more on **outsourcing for business success**, read [New England Businesses That Partner With a PEO 50% Less Likely to Fail . . . Here's Why](#).

Numbers. Use commas to separate sets of three digits in figures greater than 1,000.

Use figures for numbers of more than one digit. Spell out one-digit whole integers unless they appear in a sentence with another number requiring figures.

- E.g. I only have **two** pairs of shoes.

- E.g. I only have **2** pairs of shoe but **10** pairs of socks.

- E.g. I thought the earthquake measured **one** on the Richter scale.

- E.g. Actually, the earthquake measures between **0.9** and **1.1**.

When using ratios, spell them out; avoid using fractions:

- E.g. The Earth is over **two-thirds** water.

When estimating numbers in the millions or greater, use a figure followed by the denomination written out:

- E.g. After the number 999,999 comes **1 million**.

- E.g. Over **7 billion** people live on planet Earth.

Paragraph Length. Paragraph breaks make writing more dynamic and keep readers engaged. Blocks of text, by contrast, are daunting and hard to absorb. Keep paragraphs short: two or three sentences.

Parenthetical Phrases. Use sparingly (and only when your sentence would otherwise confuse readers).

Spacing. Use single spaces between sentences, 1.15 spacing between lines, and 12 point spacing between paragraphs. Do not double space between paragraphs.

State Names. Use AP abbreviations (e.g. Ind., Fla., Calif.), not postal abbreviations (e.g. IN, FL, CA).

Time. Hour, minute (if applicable), then the period (a.m. or p.m.) in lowercase.

- `E.g. The show will start sometime between `**`7:45 p.m.`**` and `**`8 p.m.`**

PUNCTUATION

Use the AP Stylebook's punctuation guidelines, including rules for spacing after sentences (single), serial commas (forego the final one before the "and" in a simple list), hyphens (to help clarify modifiers or indicate a range), and quotation marks (double, unless in a headline or nested quote).

COMMONLY USED WORDS & EXPRESSIONS

401k. Not "401K" or "401(k)." Pluralization is "401k's."

B2B, B2C. Short for "business-to-business" or "business-to-consumer."

can, may, might. "Can" indicates that the occurrence of an event is possible. Both "may" and "might" signal a chance of an event actually occurring. Best practices conflict, but in general, "may" indicates a stronger chance, while "might" indicates a weaker chance.

- `E.g. Julia and I `**`can`**` go to the movies tonight. She `**`may`**` end up going, and I `**`might`**` join you later.`

doctor, physician. When referring to a doctor of medicine, the preferred usage is "physician."

email. Not "e-mail" or "Email."

ensure. Avoid using to mean "guarantee" or "make certain." Try something different first.

fact that. Overused. Can usually be shortened to just "that."

health care. Not "healthcare." If used an adjective, hyphenate ("health-care") when necessary to avoid confusion.

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internet. Do not treat as a proper noun.

it's important to. Avoid starting sentences this way. Can usually be deleted without altering meaning.

key. Avoid using as a free-standing adjective.

- E.g. Several **key** considerations go into starting a small business.

leverage. Avoid using as a verb meaning "to gain an advantage."

like. Avoid using as an adjective meaning "similar to." Try using "as" instead.

literally. Avoid using to mean "figuratively."

- E.g. The blog I wrote **literally** blew my own mind.

Use it instead to mean "actually."

- E.g. He used a pistol to **literally** blow his own mind.

metrics. Avoid using as a synonym for "numbers." "Metrics" is a theory of measurement.

monetize. Avoid if possible. Industry slang for the concept of creating a viable business model.

more and more. Less is more. Avoid this phrase.

one. Avoid using as a personal pronoun; if nothing else will do, try using something else instead.

only. Use as close as possible to the word it modifies to avoid confusion.

- E.g. I will **only** buy you a seashell if you take me to the shore.
- E.g. I will buy you a seashell **only** if you take me to the shore.

Open Enrollment. Proper noun; always receives capitalization.

optimize. Avoid using to mean "improve" or "perfect."

quality. Use to mean "how good or bad something is" or "a characteristic or feature that something has." If using to mean "of a superior kind" use another construction (e.g. "high quality") instead.

percent. Spell out; use % symbol in headlines only.

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remember to. Avoid starting sentences this way. Can usually be deleted without altering meaning.

should. Avoid using to preface advice. Try explaining *why* instead.

- E.g. Businesses **should** invest time in hiring the right people.

- E.g. Business that invest time in hiring the right people **make more money.**

start-up. Not "startup" or "start up."

sure. Avoid constructions such as "be sure to" and "make sure that."

there is, there are. Avoid this phrasing as it is often inelegant and unnecessary.

- E.g. **There is** a hard choice we must now face," isn't as good as, "We must now face a hard choice.

which, that. In general, use "that" when introducing a phrase without commas, and use "which" in a phrase set off by them.

- E.g. The war **that** we fought from 1942-46 ended in an American victory.

- E.g. The war**, which** we fought from 1942-46**,** ended in an American victory.

while. Avoid using to indicate contradiction, as in "although" or "whereas."

- E.g. **While** some people still say "chifforobe," most just call it a "wardrobe."

Use instead to indicate contemporaneity.

- E.g. **While** Mary took the car to the store, John cleared the boxes from the garage.

who, whom. Personal pronoun. "Who" is the subjective form, whereas "whom" is the objective.

- E.g. "**Who** wrote this article?" (<u>He</u> wrote it.)

- E.g. "**Whom** was this article written for?" (It was written for <u>him</u>.)

utilize. Avoid. Try "use," instead.

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you. It's very tempting, especially when writing prescriptive prose, but try whenever possible to avoid using the second person.

- E.g. "**You** can protect **your** business by filing returns on time."

- E.g. "**Owners** can protect **their** businesses by filing returns on time."

DEFINITIONS

401k. A retirement investment vehicle that allows employers to contribute a portion of employee wages to individual accounts under the plan. This can be in the form of a profit-share, stocks or mutual funds, or other investment types. Generally, money in a 401k is considered income in the year it is withdrawn, and taxes are deferred until such date.

Anchor text. Also called "link text." *The user-visible text of a link. Search engines use anchor text to determine the relevancy of the referring site and the link to the content on the landing page.* -- The Art of SEO, 3rd Ed.

Competing content. Any content from another provider that competes with yours because it 1) contains similar subject matter or 2) was published by a directly competitive organization.

External content. Content not on the client website.

Internal content. Content on the client website.

Keyword. *A word or phrase that a search engine user might use to find relevant web pages. If a keyword doesn't appear anywhere in the text of your web page, it's less likely that your page will appear in the search results for that term.* -- The Art of SEO, 3rd Ed.

Landing Page. *In online marketing, a landing page, sometimes known as a "lead capture page" or a "lander", is a single web page that appears in response to clicking on a search engine optimized search result or an online advertisement. The landing page will usually display directed sales copy that is a logical extension of the advertisement, search result or link.* -- Wikipedia.com

Lifecycle/Sales funnel stage. A metaphorical construct used to describe the stages buyers go through in deciding to use a product or service. At the "top" of the funnel are unqualified prospects who have lots of problem-related -- but few product-related -- questions. Moving toward the "bottom" of the funnel, as prospective customers learn

more about specific solutions, marketing materials become more product-related, prospects become leads, and finally a sale is ready to take place.

Meta description. *A meta tag hidden in the HTML that describes the page's content. Should be relatively short; around 12 to 20 words* (max 150-160 characters) *is suggested. The meta description provides an opportunity to influence how your web page is described in the search results.* -- The Art of SEO, 3rd Ed.

Persona. *Personas are fictional, generalized characters that encompass the various needs, goals, and observed behavior patterns among your real and potential customers.* -- Hubspot

PEO. P̲rofessional E̲mployer O̲rganization. *A firm that provides a service under which an employer can* outsource *employee management tasks, such as employee benefits, payroll and workers' compensation, recruiting, risk/safety management, and training and development. The PEO does this by hiring a client company's employees, thus becoming their employer of record for tax purposes and insurance purposes. This practice is known as* joint employment *or co-employment.* -- Wikipedia.com

Primary Source. Resources created during the period under scrutiny. Often includes original documents such as interviews, diaries, creative works and official records. When linking to external pages, cite primary sources when possible.

Secondary Source. Recaps, reviews, interprets or analyzes primary sources. These include most publications: books, magazines, blog articles, etc. The blog articles you write are secondary sources. Avoid linking to competing secondary sources.