

## Writing Good is Something to be Proud Of

The art of writing well may not be lost, but it often seems to be misplaced.

I'm no Ernest Hemingway, but I know dangling modifiers and unnecessary apostrophes when I see them. Many of my petty pet peeves involve improper use of verbiage in any printed medium.

It seems like the invention of email has really dumbed-down interpersonal communications. Since hardly anyone considers emails to be fine literature, that may be an excuse to take shortcuts on proper sentence structure - let alone the use of complete words and sentences. Don't ask me about emojis.

Sometimes people send me emails so garbled I have to respond, "WHAT?" Shouting is okay when busting people for abusing the English language.

Sadly, nobody gets it right every time. Google up "common writing errors" and you'll find some mistakes we're all guilty of. Or you'll find some mistakes of which we're all guilty.

Every now and then I'll write something I know is improper and let it stand just because the correct way seems so stilted. That's another irritant - it seems like we're rewarding people for doing something wrong so often it becomes accepted, if not preferred.

An example of this occurred last week when the Press-Citizen reported that a magician "locked himself in chains and sunk to the bottom of the Iowa River." The grammar police used to arrest you for using "sunk" when "sank" will suffice, but I was dismayed to find that many authoritative sources now accept both as equally correct.

I suppose I could be oversensitive because the writing culture in Iowa City is officially a Big Deal. Not just because of the Iowa Writers Workshop, Prairie Lights Bookstore and our designation as UNESCO City of Literature, but there are a host of other reasons as well.

One event that flies beneath most people's radar is the annual and upcoming Iowa Writers Festival, which runs from mid-June through July. It's a series of

weekend and week-long workshops featuring a dizzying number of topics taught by experts from all over the country.

I've taken three different weeklong courses over the years, and each time I've been the only one in my class from the Iowa City area. Writers of all ages and experience levels routinely travel great distances to attend. If you'd like to tempt yourself, go to [iowasummerwritingfestival.org](http://iowasummerwritingfestival.org) – registration is under way.

We could all afford to be more literate. According to the media technology company contently.com, 50% of U.S. adults read at the 8<sup>th</sup> grade level, with half reading higher and half lower. Happily, Iowans have the highest literacy rate in the nation, according to the Iowa Register.

Last week I discovered there's a feature built into the spellcheck of Microsoft Word that will review any Word document and assign it a grade level based on the well-known Flesch-Kincaid scale. This column weighs in at 9.8 and I went back to check my previous three columns which ranged from 9.2 to 12.2. Higher is not better – every now and then someone will tell me that they didn't understand something I wrote.

By the way, that previous sentence should probably read in part “someone will tell me he or she didn't understand...” It contained what one of my UI rhetoric instructors referred to as “a dreaded ‘that’.” Furthermore, the plural “they” didn't agree with the singular “someone.” Most people wouldn't have noticed. Or cared.

Strictly defined, any literate person is a writer, but just because you can poke the correct keys on a keyboard more often than not doesn't make you a good one. This is why ghost writers and editors have jobs. Not to mention columnists, but don't ask me how quickly it's making me rich.

Writers Group member Dave Parsons has been patiently awaiting his first paycheck from the Press-Citizen for over 25 years, but he'd settle in a hot second for a free subscription.