



## The Importance of Writing Skills – Now and in Your Future

*"The pen is mightier than the sword." -Edward Bulwer-Lytton*

The above quotation stresses the power and importance of the written word. Teachers and employers alike say that writing skills – and communication skills in general – are one of the top abilities they look for in students/employees, and also one of the most lacking. Why is writing important to you no matter what career you are interested in? How can you improve your writing ability? The following excerpt from an article in the January 2006 issue of *Career World* will answer these questions:

Students who write skillfully generally do well in any subject that requires essay exams, reports, and research papers... The ability to write well will serve you long after you've taken the SAT and finished your last high school research paper, however. Long a part of the college application process, essays are read and evaluated by admissions officers...Potential employers also look carefully at writing ability. And once you're employed, your writing skills can contribute to success on the job. Writing allows you to express yourself clearly and thoughtfully in just about any situation.

"No one will take you seriously if you submit a poorly written application essay or an ineptly crafted resume and cover letter," says Anna Ivey, a private admissions counselor. "If you don't write well when you're supposed to be at your best, people will question your dedication, your attention to detail, your professionalism, and your competence." "Writing is the one skill that's indispensable in the modern workplace," says Niobe Way, a professor at New York University. "And it's the skill that's most lacking at every level--from high school to graduate school and out in the business world."

Here are some suggestions for improving your writing skills, no matter what your level, from the same article:

- Know the rules. That sounds simple enough, but weaknesses in grammar, usage, and spelling are all too common. "Believe it or not, 90 percent of people don't have the most basic skills, and that is bothersome to employers," says Lisa Jacobson, chief executive officer of Inspirica, a New York college admissions preparation company. "Just checking for typos and basic grammar is the first step."
- Don't rely on a spell checker. It can't spot common mistakes in usage, such as its/it's and then/than. If you know and apply the rules correctly, your audience can concentrate on your message, not your mistakes. A good reference book to keep on hand is *The Elements of Style*, by William Strunk Jr. and E. B. White.

- Be clear. The best writing aims not to impress, but to communicate. That means keeping your writing simple and well organized so that your reader understands you...Don't clutter your writing with unnecessary words ("I believe that the gastronomic pleasure provided by grapes is really quite notable") when you can get straight to the point ("Grapes are delicious").
- The right tone is also important, according to Jennifer Karan, national director of SAT and ACT programs for Kaplan Test Prep and Admissions. "A writer's tone should be natural and appropriate for the type of communication," she says. "Clarity is paramount, and a straightforward tone is often best, especially in business." For example, in work situations, don't use instant-messaging shorthand such as "u" or "18r." Distinguish between situations that call for formal language and those for which a conversational tone is appropriate.
- Practice makes perfect. If writing is your weak spot, take heart. Practice is the real secret to success. If writing is already one of your strong points, continued practice will sharpen your skills. "You don't need special talent to be a decent writer," says Jacobson. "If you learn how to structure basic writing, you can follow the formula. And the more you write, the better you get." If you need motivation to write, keep a journal or Web log, or seek out opportunities to write for your school paper or yearbook. Practicing means taking the time to rewrite material, usually more than once, so that you both eliminate mistakes and carefully make improvements in organization and wording.
- Get help. It is said that writing is solitary work, and that is true. But getting help from other people--teachers, friends, or tutors--is a smart idea. Good writers often find value in feedback from others. "If you want to become a better writer, identify someone who can read and provide feedback on your work," Paige says. "It helps to see your mistakes and then discuss how they might be fixed."
- Don't be discourage by constructive criticism, but also don't take everything people say about your writing to heart. Eventually, you will become confident enough in your own style that you can pick and choose the feedback that is most useful to you.
- Read. The more you read excellent writing, the more likely you are to increase your own sense of what makes effective communication. "The best writers are also avid readers," Ivey says. "Even if you're not a fan of high literature, there are other ways you can make exposure to good writing a part of your daily routine." Reading newspapers, magazines, and blogs can help you identify effective writing.



Now that you know that in writing, just as in other areas, practice makes perfect, here are some sentences to practice on from "Getting Your Writing Right: Skills to Help You Avoid Common Writing Mistakes." Rewrite each so that it has no mistakes. Each one contains at least one error and some have several. You may need to add words, subtract words, fix words or punctuation, rearrange words, or create two sentences out of one. The correct answers are also provided. Don't cheat!

1. My brother and me go to a lot of concerts
2. In the E-mail that she sent to myself last week
3. An eagle soared across the sky it's wingspan was magnificent.
4. Running down the hall, a locker door tripped me.
5. No one, not even Cherise D.J. or Fatima, want to challenge Mings decision.
6. Heres whose left; Tyrone, Maria, Martella and Martellas Cousin.
7. Terry and him were late however: they apologized to Victor, Inez and I.
8. Because the City we visited and it's surrounding area.
9. My uncle Tiny enrolled my Aunt and him in a class at the local College.
10. The mountain were treacherous, it intimidated even the best skiers.

#### Answers:

1. My brother and I go to a lot of concerts.
2. In the E-mail that she sent to me last week, [add independent clause to correct sentence fragment].
3. An eagle soared across the sky; its wingspan was magnificent. [Period after "sky" is also okay.]
4. Running down the hall, I tripped over a locker door.
5. No one, not even Cherise, D.J., or Fatima, wants to challenge Ming's decision.
6. Here's who's left: Tyrone, Maria, Martella and Martella's cousin.
7. Terry and he were late; however, they apologized to Victor, Inez and me.
8. Because the City we visited and its surrounding area [sentence fragment needs completion].
9. My uncle Tiny enrolled my Aunt and himself in a class at the local college.
10. The mountain was treacherous; it intimidated even the best skiers. [Period after "treacherous" is also okay.]

#### Works Cited

"Getting Your Writing Right: Skills to Help You Avoid Common Writing Mistakes." South Deerfield, MA: Channing Bete Company, 2006.

Rowh, Mark . "Write well, go far: it's the skill every employer demands. Here's how to build it." *Career World*. 34.4 (2006): 18-22.



Happy Birthday!

### July

- 2 Kate Kalahar
- 2 Shaudae Moore
- 3 Alexis Montover
- 13 Marisa Vivians
- 24 Brittany Mabry
- 24 Andres Martinez
- 26 Stephany Funk
- 26 Tara Taylor
- 26 Aaron Watley

### August

- 2 Kashonna Drain
- 11 Brittiney Goldman
- 13 Terrence Roberts

### September

- 22 Kiara Byrd
- 22 Kristian Byrd
- 27 Trenton Smith
- 28 Ciarra Monroe



Words of Wisdom

“I am still determined to be cheerful and happy, in whatever situation I may be; for I have also learned from experience that the greater part of our happiness or misery depends upon our dispositions, and not upon our circumstances.” -Martha Washington

“You may be disappointed if you fail, but you are doomed if you don't try.” -Beverly Sills

“I not only use all the brains that I have, but all that I can borrow.”  
-Woodrow Wilson



## Director's Letter

*'If you have made mistakes, even serious ones, there is always another chance for you.  
What we call failure is not the falling down, but the staying down.'* -Mary Pickford

One of the lessons to be learned from this poignant statement is the importance of resiliency. Dictionary.com defines resiliency as, "an occurrence of rebounding or springing back." Possessing this ability to spring back after experiencing some of life's inevitable challenges makes all the difference in how successful an individual will be in life.

A February 2006 article in *Professional School Counseling* discussed the role resiliency – more than other factors - in students, and in the family as whole, plays in achievement:

Though this research is voluminous, efforts to predict students' academic achievement based on family socioeconomic status or family structure configuration have been only moderately successful. Analyzing 101 different studies of this kind, White (1982) reported that only 25% of the variance in student school achievement could be accounted for by family socioeconomic status or family structure configuration [two parent family/single parent family/working mother family/etc]. Despite this modest success, research on family socioeconomic status and structure has been used to confirm many of the stereotypes and misconceptions appearing in the popular media about the negative influence on children of being in low-income, non-White, or single-parent family structures....Clark: "Of the many studies that have shown a statistical correlation between background, life chances, and life achievement, few seem to explain adequately the fact that many youngsters with disadvantaged backgrounds perform very well in school and in later life."

We now know that the particular ways that family members interact with their children are much more powerful predictors of children's school achievement than family status variables (e.g., income, parental educational level) or family structure variables (e.g., intact or divorced family) alone. Walberg (1984), for example, found that while only 25% of the variance in student reading achievement was explained by social class or family structure configuration (e.g., intact or divorced family), 60% of the variance in reading achievement was explained by the particular interactions that family members engaged in with their children.

There is no doubt that some students, for a variety of reasons, begin their education at a deficit. Education, and the world at large, is not yet an even play field. However, it is programs such as Upward Bound that are working to even that playing field by fostering crucial resiliency in working with the family, community, school, and student. With a new school year approaching, be ready to

spring back from any difficulties you experienced last year or this summer. The past is to be learned from to improve the future. Have a great year!

Work Cited

Amatea, Ellen S., Sondra Smith-Adcock, and Elizabeth Villares. "From Family Deficit to Family Strength: Viewing Families' Contributions to Children's Learning from a Family Resilience Perspective." *Professional School Counseling* 9.3 (2006): 177-90.