

Write Right

(Guidelines, Rules, and Hints for Beginning Writers)

I. Basic Skills (What you should have learned in school.)

1. A working knowledge of the English Language.

A. If you can speak it correctly, you can probably write it correctly.

B. Conversational English differs from written English.

2. The mechanics of writing - Sentences, Paragraphs, Capitalization, and punctuation.

A. Sentences

a. A complete thought containing a subject (noun) and a predicate (verb).

b. Avoid run on sentences. Divide them into smaller sentences.

B. Paragraphs

a. A collection of sentences discussing one topic.

b. Avoid one or two sentence paragraphs.

c. Avoid run-on paragraphs that contain too many topics.

C. Capitalization and Punctuation.

a. Consult a dictionary or a high school English guide.

II. Language, Words, and Phrases

1. Use common words and phrases

A. Remember your readers - write to be understood.

2. Avoid slang and vulgar terms

3. Avoid "cute" terms and phrases

A. Don't see how many different names you can think of for a person, place, thing.

B. Don't refer to people, places, or things with archaic or worn expressions.

4. Avoid repetitive phrases.

- A. Don't repeat the same words over and over.
 - a. "And then I . . ." "Arriving at the next set . . ." "For the next step."
- B. Don't open each paragraph with the same word or phrase.
- 5. Avoid repeat words, especially within the same sentence.
 - A. "The fox jumped up, and we followed the fox to where the fox went in the brush."
- 6. Avoid writing in the future tense.
 - A. "I place a trap in the bed." Not "I will place a trap in the bed."

III. Your Story

- 1. Choose a topic you are familiar with.
 - A. Research your information - don't guess.
 - B. Narrow the focus of your topic.
 - a. Don't be too general - don't pick a topic better covered in a book.
 - 1. "How to Trap Mink" would be too broad.
 - 2. Narrow the focus: Trapping Mink with Bodygrips, Bait for Mink, Blind Sets for Mink.
- 2. Assemble your thoughts in logical groups and order.
 - A. Start at the beginning.
 - B. Build your story as you would build a house.
 - C. Cover each element thoroughly in one or more paragraphs.
 - a. Don't scatter information.
 - b. Don't mix elements among different parts of the story.
- 3. Make a rough outline.
 - A. List the various elements that will make up your story.
- 4. Write a rough draft.
 - A. Don't take time to correct mistakes, just get your thoughts .
- 5. Write a specific beginning and ending paragraph.
 - A. The beginning paragraph introduces the reader to your topic.

- a. Let the reader know what you will be writing about.
 - b. The "Three Sentence Rule" - catch the reader's attention as quickly as possible. Hopefully in the first three sentences
- B. The ending paragraph tells the reader that you are finished.
 - a. Don't leave the reader hanging in mid air.
 - b. Review the main points or features of your story.
 - c. Use the last sentence to "close the door".
- 6. Correct and make additions to or deletions in the rough draft.
- 7. Write a final draft.

IV. Tools - Use the best that are available to you.

- 1. Pen and paper - the basic necessity.
 - A. Readily available and easy to use.
 - B. Use blue or black ink -no reds or greens
 - C. Lined paper is okay.
 - a. Use a good quality paper - no "3 Ring Notebook" paper
 - 1. don't use non-standard sizes. No 'steno" pads and no 14" legal pads.
- 2. Computers with word processors.
 - A. A better choice for serious authors.
 - B. Extreme versatility in editing and changing text.
 - a. Eliminates the need for rewriting or retyping text.
 - b. Built in spelling checkers.
 - C. Print pages with the push of a button.
 - D. Save your story in "electronic" format. Submit it on a disk, or send it via email.

V. Photos - They enhance the value of a manuscript.

- 1. Subject Matter.
 - A. Use photos that pertain to your story.
 - a. Don't send muskrat photos with a mink story.

- B. Photos that show people engaged in a task are the best.**
 - a. "Me and My Catch" photos are marginally interesting, but may be better than none.**
 - b. "Animal in a Trap" photos are a dime a dozen and hold very little interest for a reader.**
 - c. Get someone to assist you in taking photos. Get in the picture yourself, or have your helper pose for the picture. (Make sure you or your helper are properly attired and your scenes are natural.)**
- 2. Don't submit poor quality photos.**
 - A. Photos out of focus or taken in bad light are no good. There is nothing a publisher can do to improve them.**
 - B. Choose your photos from an "outsiders" point of view.**
 - a. Don't fool yourself into thinking a photo is good just because you like it or it brings back fond memories.**
 - b. Ask yourself what a stranger who knew nothing about you or your trapline would think about the picture.**
- 3. Paper print photos.**
 - A. Write your captions on a separate sheet of paper.**
 - a. One half of an 8 1/2 X 11" sheet is good.**
 - b. Do not write the caption on the back of the photo.**
 - c. Carefully write your name and address on the back of the photos.**
 - Note the following:**
 - 1. Pressing too hard with a ball point pen can damage the photo**
 - 2. Felt tip pens can bleed off on the face of an underlying photo if the photos are stacked together. Make sure the ink is dry.**
 - d. Tape one edge of the caption sheet to the back of the photo and fold the sheet over to protect the front of the photo.**

- B. Write a caption for the photo. Describe the person, place, and/or activity that the photo depicts.**
- C. Protect photos and manuscripts shipped with photos.**
 - a. Encase the manuscript, or at least the photos, in stiff cardboard.**

4. Digital Photos

- A. May be submitted on disk or by email.**
- B. Captions should be provided**

VI Editors

- 1. The editor makes the ultimate decision on publication of your manuscript.**
 - A. An editor's primary responsibility is to the readers not to the writers.**
- 2. It is a good policy to write an editor before you send a manuscript.**
 - A. Some editors prefer a "query" letter in which you give a brief summary of your manuscript.**
 - B. Others may ask you to just send the finished manuscript for examination.**
 - C. Always enclose a self-addressed stamped envelope if you are requesting a reply from an editor.**
- 3. Don't call editors.**
 - A. Editors ordinarily do not have time to chit-chat with writers.**
 - B. Editors are adept at written communications and usually prefer to conduct business in that manner.**
- 4. Editors are professional as well as human.**
 - A. Your story will be judged primarily on content, originality, and execution.**
 - B. Your story will also be judged on how your package looks and how you present yourself.**
 - a. Neatness and appearance count.**
 - b. Don't make demands or suggestions to an editor.**

- 1. Don't suggest that this is a good article for the next issue or you would like to see this published in the next issue. Let the editor decide on its quality and when it will be published.**
 - 2. Give your credentials but don't brag.**
- 5. If you expect a reply on your manuscript, enclose a self-addressed stamped envelope. If you want your package returned in case it is not used be sure to state this in your cover letter and include sufficient postage.**
- 6. Don't take issue with an editor.**
 - A. If an editor asks you to change or rewrite your manuscript you have two options - do or don't.**
 - a. It is pointless to argue that your manuscript should be accepted as is.**
 - b. If your manuscript is rejected, an editor will usually give you an explanation.**
 - c. Arguing with an editor will probably jeopardize your chances for future acceptance.**