



Seven Tips for Stronger Writing

Do you ever sit frozen before the screen, struggling to begin that all-important letter? Or look at a finished proposal and know in your heart that it could be better – but not know how to improve it?

You're not alone. To help you along the way, here are seven fool-proof tricks that can help any writer, no matter how experienced:

1. Verbs do the heavy lifting, so don't let them get away with acting weak. If you fall back on the passive (*something is done*, rather than *something does something*) or use the verb "to be" most of the time, then rewrite a few sentences to use more colourful, active verbs. Your writing will spring to life.

QUICK EXAMPLE: Change "The funds were used..." to "We used the funds..."

2. Print your text out and read it aloud. You will see typos on the printed page that you'll never catch on the screen. If you write things that you wouldn't actually say, or repeat the same words too often, you'll notice that too. Now you can revise, using fresh words that you would naturally use in conversation.
3. Put slash marks between each sentence. If the sentences all run about the same length, then break some up so that you place very short sentences between longer ones.
4. Watch out for prepositions. They're those sneaky little words such as "of, from, by, for, to" that link phrases without verbs. If you use three or more phrases in a row that begin with a preposition, your sentence will run out of steam. Rewrite so that the sentence is driven by a verb, and cut as many prepositions as you can.

QUICK EXAMPLE: Change "The beneficiaries in the last year of the programme for children from the city were invited to return" to "We invited city children who took part in last year's programme to return."

5. Stuck for new ways to open a letter or proposal? How about asking a question? You can even turn your headers into questions. For example, instead of "Evaluation" as a header, you could write "How Will You Know When We Have Succeeded?"
6. Interview everyone around you: staff, volunteers, donors, trustees, beneficiaries. Ask them why they love the charity, or what they think the world would look like *without* it. Write down the words and stories as you hear them and use them (with permission, of course) to bring your own writing back to life.
7. Writing well is hard work, and it's the rare soul indeed who can write for more than four or five hours a day, max. Give yourself a break. Take a walk. Listen to some music. New ideas will come to you just when you least expect them.

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