

WRITING SHORT ARTICLES THAT ENGAGE THE READER

Time and time again readers must suffer “Internet English” that is poorly written and is lacking in cohesion, flow, structure or style. These basic elements require correcting before publishing or launching any social media marketing campaign to promote an article. Good writing builds followers not loses them. Here's what to do to develop effective writing skills.

Drafting a short five-paragraph article that fits onto a single A4 printed page (New Times Roman, font size 12) forces an author to be more organized and develop effective writing habits. The five paragraphs of the short article will include:

- an introduction paragraph (1)
- three main body paragraphs (2, 3 and 4)
- a conclusion paragraph (5)

Introduction paragraph (1)

The introduction paragraph starts with a general discussion of the subject and leads to a specific statement of the main point of the article. Sometimes it's good to begin with something to catch the attention of the reader such as a challenging claim, controversial point of view or unusual story. The short summary should tell in two sentences maximum what the main point or argument is, and, briefly, what the three main body paragraphs will discuss. This brings cohesion to the writing and helps engage the reader more strongly.

Three main paragraphs (2, 3 and 4)

Each main body paragraph works best by focusing on a single idea, reason, or example that supports the main line of what the author is writing about. Each paragraph must contain a clear topic sentence that briefly states the main idea of the paragraph. Also, it is advisable to include only as much discussion or explanation as is strictly necessary to clarify the point. Use details and specific examples to help clarify ideas for the reader and make the content convincing.

It is advisable to use supporting evidence such as statistics, facts, quotations from experts and examples which will all help to provide a credible scientific evidence base. Presenting specific and relevant evidence in a systematic and well-organized manner will also appeal to the reader's sense of logic and structure. Always be mindful of the reader and never leave them confused or lost.

An article that is well written always considers opposing views by anticipating the concerns and questions that a highly critical reader might have about the subject that is under discussion. Responding to these points will give the author the chance to explain why their viewpoint, recommendation or urge to action is the best one to follow.

Between each paragraph and the one that follows, a transition sentence is needed. It's not effective to simply jump from one idea to the next as this only confuses the reader and interrupts the momentum that builds up to the conclusion paragraph. Writers that write for the reader and not for themselves use the end of one paragraph and/or the beginning of the next to show the relationship between the two connected ideas. No reader is left behind, no one excluded from following the author's train of thought through the writing.

Transitions connect the paragraphs to one another, especially the three main body ones. A transition can be built into the topic sentence of the next paragraph, or it can be the concluding sentence of the preceding paragraph. It can even be a combination of both. To express the relationship between the two paragraphs, think about words and phrases that compare and contrast. Try to use, for instance:

- Pros and cons ("on the one/other hand . . .")
- Something of greater significance? ("more importantly, . . .")
- An earlier historical example? ("even before,...")
- A different kind of consideration? (budget versus time constraints).

It is important to give enough time to think about the paragraph topics and keep brainstorming until finding the most relevant ways to link them. It rarely happens the first time an article is drafted.

Some kind of special transition will be required from the final body paragraph (4) to the concluding paragraph (5). One way is to summarize with some reminders of the content of the previous paragraphs (2 and 3). There's no need to restate the topics fully (that will come in the conclusion paragraph) but it is good to sometimes refer to a detail, or example, or person mentioned as a way of pulling the ideas of the article together and signaling to the reader that the conclusion is approaching.

Persuasive writing moves readers to action or belief. It does not simply provide entertainment value or offer information. Persuasive writing stimulates a response from the reader, engaging them with the power of the ideas contained within the words that express them.

Conclusion paragraph (5)

All well written short articles for Internet, or elsewhere, need to end with a strong conclusion or concluding paragraph. This paragraph presents evidence and explanations that summarize the author's view in a clear and memorable way. Published writing that is persuasive typically includes a call or urge to action.

The concluding paragraph often starts with a restatement of the main point of the article, however in a slightly reworded version of the statement used in the introduction paragraph. This opening is followed by some sentences that emphasize the importance of the topic and the significance of the point of view expressed by the author. What idea or feeling does the author wish to leave the reader with to maximize the impact of the article? The conclusion paragraph is the reverse of the introduction paragraph in that it starts by focusing on specific details and moves to end with a wider generalization.