

# Useful Tips for All Writers, Professional and Amateur

Source: <http://grammar.about.com/od/advicefromthepros/a/Ten-Unconventional-Writing-Tips.htm?nl=1>

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## Get on the Plane

"As a nonfiction [writer](http://grammar.about.com/od/mo/g/nonfictionterm.htm) you must get on the plane. If a subject interests you, go after it, even if it's in the next county or the next state or the next country. It's not going to come looking for you." (William Zinsser, *On Writing Well*, 7th ed. HarperCollins, 2006)

## Start Strong

"Here is the most underrated writing tip I know: when possible, make the subject [of a sentence](http://grammar.about.com/od/rs/g/subject.htm) a person, a collection of persons, or a thing. When you choose a concept or some other intangible as a subject, you're generally forced into an awkward verb or, at best, the passive voice [." \(Ben Yagoda, \*How to Not Write Bad\*. Riverhead Books, 2013\)](http://grammar.about.com/od/pq/g/pasvoiceterm.htm)

## Construct a Self

"To put it directly, the narrative 'I' [is a fiction](http://grammar.about.com/od/pq/g/personaterm.htm). This is not to say it is a lie. It is an emblem of a personality made up of elements that the author may in fact possess or may only aspire to. As in fiction, the 'I' of reportage is a constructed thing, a vast simplification of its creator. . . . To place yourself on the page is in part self-discovery, in part self-creation." (Tracy Kidder and Richard Todd, *Good Prose: The Art of Nonfiction*. Random House, 2013)

## Speak to Your Reader

"Visualize your reader [and write specifically for that reader](http://grammar.about.com/od/ab/g/audiencterm.htm). Speaking directly to your reader may seem obvious, but this tenet is said to be one of the most overlooked aspects of effective writing." (Joyce Lain Kennedy, *Cover Letters For Dummies*, 3rd ed. Wiley, 2009)

## Outline Your Draft

"[B]riefly outline your rough draft. Making an outline *after* you have written the paper may seem odd, but this step is essential if you have written the first draft without devising and following a detailed plan. Jotting down your main ideas and supporting points at this stage in the process will enable you to review your essay quickly and easily. You can examine its skeleton and decide whether everything fits together properly. (Susan Day, Robert Funk, and Elizabeth McMahan, *Reading and the Writing Process*. Macmillan, 1994)

## Get the Name of the Dog

"At the *St. Petersburg Times*, editors and writing coaches warn reporters not to return to the office without 'the name of the dog.' That reporting task does not require the writer to use the detail [in the story](http://grammar.about.com/od/d/g/Detail-term.htm), but it reminds the reporter to keep her eyes and ears opened. . . . The good writer uses telling details, not only to inform, but to persuade." (Roy Peter Clark, *Writing Tools: 50 Essential Strategies for Every Writer*. Little, Brown, 2006)

## Use Punch Lines

"The same technique a comedian uses to make people laugh--careful setup and good punch line-- can help you write sentences people like to read. Start with material that is familiar, scene-setting, or unsurprising, and end with material that is new or detailed or surprising." (Michael Harvey, *The Nuts and Bolts of College Writing*. Hackett Publishing, 2003)

## Listen to the Music

"One of the most important things you can do to sharpen your style [is to reawaken yourself to the sound of your words](http://grammar.about.com/od/rs/g/styleterm.htm), to tune your ears to the rhythm [and cadence](http://grammar.about.com/od/rs/g/rhythmterm.htm) and flow of your language. . . . [L]isten carefully to the music of your language, to the alternation of strong and weak elements in the rhythm of your words, and to the cadence of sound and silence in the flow of your sentences." (Stephen Wilbers, *Keys to Great Writing*. Writer's Digest Books, 2000)

## Sort Out the Peanuts

"Bad things happen when we unload our jam-packed thoughts like a box of Styrofoam peanuts. The box is emptied, and *ah*, that feels good for a moment. But the contents are all over the place. Controlled sentences--take a deep breath here--*deliver precise language in an emphatic* [arrangement based on logic, economy and clarity](http://grammar.about.com/od/e/g/emphasisterm.htm) [, all to engage the reader](http://grammar.about.com/od/c/g/clarityterm.htm). (Exhale)." (Arthur Plotnik, *Spunk & Bite*. Random House, 2005)

## Stop

"A writing tip borrowed from Lewis Carroll's *Alice's Adventures in Wonderland*: When you come to the end, stop." (Harry F. Wolcott, *Writing Up Qualitative Research*, 3rd ed. Sage, 2009)