

The Sun Dial, The Compass and the Semaphore: Writing for the Global Web

We're here to talk about writing for the global web. Don't worry, it's not a thing. When we intone "global web," it's not some metaverse-y™ concept. It's all about inclusivity in content creation with a goal of reaching the largest possible swath of content consumers.

As a professional, you likely prickle at the old tropes of "knowing your audience" and "writing for the Web." And we know you already avoid jargon, clichés, bad puns and tired similes ~~like the plague.~~

The same principles apply to writing for a multitude of platforms and publications, from video scripts to corporate PowerPoint presentations to a letter to City Hall. While there is no right or wrong, there is definitely more engaging, more authentic and ultimately more *moving*.

Engaging. It's kind of a buzz word but it's also a persuasive strategy: tell a good yarn, reel 'em in and they'll want to hear more. Hear more, buy more, give more, vote more, act more... engage more. Engagement is about community and commonality. It's the glue that creates the fabled "stickiness" of content that we, as creatives, grasp for—whether our success is measured in click-throughs, comments, or correspondence from the muckety-mucks in City Hall. So what makes content engaging? It begins and ends with authenticity.

Conjuring an Authentic Voice

What is an authentic voice? At its core, it rings true. So how do you develop an authentic voice? Will it show if you try too hard? Probably. It might be easier to flip it and touch on what not to do when it comes to conveying words that people trust and stories that sound real.

What to Avoid

- Big words
- Fluffy words
- Extra words

Words that prove you haven't done your research.

A good mental exercise is to force yourself to understand the provenance of your content, to genuinely be able to represent its worth to your audience, not unlike a seller of antiques. Dust off the surface of your argument or thesis to find the kernel of truth that will resonate.

Stories that sound altogether too "on the mark."

We throw the word "story" around a lot these days—in marketing particularly—for good reason. Storytelling can be powerful. A good story can perk up our ears, warm our heart, scare us away from bad things and motivate us to change or be better. It's more than entertainment; it's the way we understand our world. If poorly executed, it can also be a total turn-off.

[projected slide]

"You should write because you love the shape of stories and sentences and the creation of different words on a page. Writing comes from reading, and reading is the finest teacher of how to write." —**Annie Proulx**

Can we teach you to create good stories here today? No. But these pointers might help.

Read and learn

Stephen King. We love writing and books about writing and writers who write about writing. One of our favorites is King's *On Writing, a Memoir of the Craft*. Our favorite line in this favored book? "The road to hell is paved with adverbs."

Aristotle, noted generalist, philosopher and misogynistic genius of the late 300s (BC). Sure, he was opining at the dawn of modern civilization, but his *Poetics* is pure *chef's kiss* when it comes to the art of the story. We're not going to have time to sum it up here, but it's worth your time.

Be curious ... and read some more

You already know that "knowing your audience" means more than grokking the metrics; it means knowing when you can drop in foreign phrases without sounding pretentious and when to cut out regional idioms or "inside baseball" lead balloons.

Be inclusive

You already know to use language that is inclusive as possible and to respect the diversity of your readership. But you may not know what's *au courant* in the various segments of business, education, government, science, healthcare or technology. One person's "disruptive" genius is another's confusing arrogance. Knowing your industry *is* knowing your audience.

The more you read, the more you can grasp these ineffable concepts like "tone of voice" and the syntax, cadence and poesy that can help you turn a marketing pitch into a story, spinning straw into gold, moving the needle *and* the reader, and finding meaning and joy in putting words to paper.

I want to thank you all for being here and look forward questions.

Question [plant]: I may have missed something. Why is this presentation entitled 'The Sun Dial, The Compass and the Semaphore'?

Answer: Because it sounds a lot more interesting than 'Writing for the Global Web' and is much more fun to say. (Thank you, Susan!)