

Conversational Writing

Course Workbook



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1. Speak Directly to Your Reader

Write for One Person—When you write, imagine you're talking to one person. Give that person a name and describe the person with as much detail as possible. This strategy will help your writing sound more casual, as if you're speaking one-to-one with that person instead of to a faceless crowd.

Use the second person, "You," voice.

Exercise

1. Picture your reader. Give him or her a name and describe that person. For examples, take a look at content writer, [John Espirian's pen portraits](#).
2. Change the following sentences to speak to the reader.
 - The applicant for the position requires experience with WordPress, SEO, and graphic design.
 - Before publishing a post, writers should do a thorough check of their work.
 - We encourage guests to participate in the meeting and provide their feedback.
3. Find a piece of your writing and identify the voice you're using. If it's not in 'you voice', highlight the sentences that contain third person pronouns and see whether you need to change to 'you voice'.

2. Talk Like a Human (Not a Robot)

Write the way you talk—A way to write the way you talk is to dictate your thoughts as a first draft. Once recorded, you can take note of particular expressions and words you use.

Read it aloud—Reading your work aloud helps you detect parts you need to improve.

Use contractions—A contraction is a combination of two words linked with an apostrophe into one shortened word. We use contractions when we speak because they're easier to pronounce.

Exercise

1. Try recording your text using Google Docs or a device of your own that has voice to text capability.
2. Read the text you recorded aloud and note the areas for improvement.
3. Check your use of contractions by completing the table below:

Two words	Contraction
could not	
	everyone's
he had / he would	
does not	
	let's

Two words	Contraction
should have	
who would / who had / who did	
that has / that is	
	there'll
you are	

3. Make Your Writing Clear

Passive writing is harder to read and can leave your reader confused.

You can highlight the passive sentences in your writing using an online editor like the Hemingway App, which is free at hemingwayapp.com. If you're using Microsoft Word, you can check your use of passive sentences using its Readability Statistics.

If you're using ...

- The Hemingway app: The app shows the readability grade level of your text and highlights sentences in yellow that are lengthy or complex, which you can shorten. It highlights sentences in red that are too dense and complicated and require editing.
- Microsoft Word readability statistics: Word provides two readability statistics, the Flesch Reading Ease (aim for a score of 60-80) and the Flesch-Kincaid Grade Level (aim for 7-11).

Exercise

1. Revise these passive sentences to make them active:
 - The app was named after the famous American novelist, Ernest Hemingway.
 - Answers to email inquiries were always responded to.
 - A glorious review about this course was posted on Highbrow.
2. Check your revised sentences for Exercise 1 above using the Hemingway App or Word's Readability Statistics.

4. Choose Relatable Words

Inflated words like cognizant, utilize, and leverage show off your vocabulary, but they also sound academic and a bit ~~superior~~ **snooty**.

To engage your readers in a conversation, speak with them, not at them. **The correction:** Use a thesaurus and find a simpler word.

Jargon refers to special terms, concepts, and acronyms that professions or groups use. Jargon is a language of its own for the “in-group.” And if you’re not part of the group, you feel left out. **The correction:** Identify jargon in your writing (those in-group terms). Eliminate or provide a simple explanation of what the terms mean.

Gobbledygook has become a common part of corporate lingo, consisting of overused catchphrases like state-of-the-art, world class, turnkey, scalable, and next generation. What do those terms truly mean? **The correction:** Recognize gobbledygook and replace it with feel-good, meaningful words.

Exercise

1. Get out your Thesaurus and find a simpler word for each of the following words:

Inflated word (formal)	Conversational word (informal)
ameliorate	
facilitate	
implement	
alleviate	
abbreviate	

2. Choose a technical term or jargon you've encountered while reading and find a simpler word or explanation for what it means.
3. Pick a gobbledegook term, for example turnkey, and describe it in everyday language.
4. Go through your writing and identify words that would perplex your reader. Write them down and find simple replacements.

5. Vary the Reading Pace

Break up ultra-long sentences. Combine short sentences when you have too many. And use sentence length variety: ultra-short sentences, sentence fragments, and single words.

The best way to test the pace of your writing is to read it out loud and listen to the rhythm.

Exercise

Take a piece of writing that lacks sentence length variety. Use the techniques in this lesson to make it more interesting and conversational.

6. Make Your Writing Flow

When writing doesn't flow, it's missing elements that guide and focus the reader. A key element is a transition. Transitions are words and phrases that connect one idea to the next and show the relationship between ideas. You use transitions to create a logical flow between sentences and paragraphs.

Transition type	Relationship	Transition words	Example
addition	[idea 1] added to [idea 2]	and, also, as well, in addition ...	The course covered writing techniques. And it included many practical exercises.
contrast	[idea 1] in opposition to [idea 2]	but, however, although, despite, yet ...	Tim wanted a new car. However, he'd have to wait till his finances were better.
time or sequence	first [idea 1], then [idea 2]	first, next, earlier, soon, before, following, ...	First, she measured the flour. Next, she stirred in the milk and butter.

Use varied sentence structure—To break the monotony of using the same sentence structure, try changing the way you start your sentences.

Start a sentence with a(n)	Explanation	Example
transition	a word or phrase that connects ideas and shows a relationship between them	First , they looked at the map.
dependent clause	a group of words with a subject and verb that isn't a complete sentence.	If you need help , call technical support.
preposition	A word such as after, in, to, on, and used in front of a noun or pronoun and shows relationship between the noun or pronoun and other words in a sentence	In the report, you'll find the results of the test.
infinitive phrase	"to: plus the simple form of a verb	To find the solution, read the manual.

Exercise

1. Add a transitional sentence to each example sentence in the table above, for example...**First** they looked at the map. **Then** they discovered they were lost.
2. Create a sentence of your own using each type of sentence start in the table above.

7. Change the Flow in Your Writing

Ask a Question—A question changes the flow of your writing because the reader has to stop to think about the answer.

Introduce a Pause—A pause creates a moment of suspense for your reader or an opportunity to stop and think. The em dash (—) and ellipsis (...) are two ways to insert a pause.

Em dash (—): Use em dashes to indicate a sudden shift in thought or a break in your sentence. In conversational writing, you don't need to use a space before or after an em dash.

Example: The spaceship made that noise again—loud, rattling, and worrying.

Ellipsis (...): Ellipses are useful for slowing your reader down.

Example: We heard the noise again ... a loud, worrisome rattling.

Use ellipses to indicate:

- A pause: The Jedi whimpered, "... Help."
- Omitted text: The ... flight was late.
- A trailing-off thought: If only I'd taken this course sooner ...

Exercise

1. Take a piece of writing and introduce a question or series of questions to it.
2. Write a sentence using an em-dash.
3. Refer to the examples for the ellipsis above and write a sentence of your own for each use: a pause, omitted text, and a trailing-off thought.

8. Break These 3 Writing Rules

Break these three rules: 1. Don't begin a sentence with a conjunction. 2. Don't end a sentence with a preposition. 3. Avoid interjections.

To use conversational writing, follow these rules instead.

Rule #1: Begin a Sentence with a Conjunction

You can start a sentence with one of the FANBOYS, which is a mnemonic for the words "for," "and," "nor," "but," "or," "yet," or "so."

Rule #2: End a Sentence with a Preposition

You can end a sentence with a preposition (words like "on," "in," or "after"), provided it makes sense.

Rule #3: Use Interjections (Sparingly)

We use interjections, words that convey emotion, in everyday communication. An interjection can be a single word like duh, yahoo, yuck, hallelujah, whoa, or yep. Or it can be a short statement like, "High five," or, "That bombed."

Use	To indicate	Example
exclamation mark (!)	strong emotions (excitement, surprise, anger)	Hooray! I won the contest.
question mark (?)	uncertainty or disbelief	Oh, really?
comma (,), or period (.)	weak emotions like doubt or indifference	Meh, I didn't think much of it. She did it again. Typical.

Exercise

1. Write a sentence and then follow it with a sentence that starts with one of the FANBOYS.
2. Change the following sentence to move the preposition in bold to the end:
 - You can be proud **of** the conversational writing skills this course gives you.
 - We have to put **out** the recycling on Sunday night.
3. Add an interjection before or after each of these sentences:
 - The weatherman predicted 45 degree heat for the weekend.
 - After six months on the job, Marcia got a promotion.
 - The next Star Wars movie comes out this year.

9. Build Connection With Anecdotes

An anecdote is a short, interesting story. The story might be about you, or it could be about someone else. While a story can be fictional, an anecdote is based on real-life events.

How to Craft an Anecdote

1. Figure out the point you want to make.
2. Choose a relevant event that happened to you or someone else that is an example of your point. Think of a real-life story that involved a problem—for example, a challenge, a mistake, a life-changing moment, a conflict, or a misunderstanding. To be clear about the point of your anecdote, ask yourself why you're including it. What purpose does it serve? Make sure it has some relevant value.
3. Structure your ideas and put your story together.
4. Write your story like fiction. Tell it briefly. Write it out and cut out the bits you don't need. Omit any boring details and parts that don't support your point.
5. Draw a conclusion. Remind readers of your point.

Exercise

Find a sample article that contains an anecdote, similar to the examples. Note how the writer crafts the story. How is the writer using the anecdote? What point does the anecdote support?

10. Share a Secret (Psst)

This writing device of sharing a quasi secret with readers is known as an aside. The device is similar to the technique actors use on stage to speak in private with the audience.

Humor writers often use asides to:

- Poke fun at themselves.
- State the obvious.
- Exaggerate.
- Make a witty remark.
- Add a tongue-in-cheek comment.
- Ask a rhetorical question.

Sometimes a writer might use an aside to add a sound effect, like the sound of clearing your throat (ahem) or a whisper (psst).

Exercise

Use an aside to add a conversational element to your About page or bio.