6 EXTRA WRITING TIPS
TO BECOME A BETTER WRITER

Capture Your Surroundings with a Swipe File

In the tip #1 I wrote that you need to take notes from everything you read and have all of that information in one centralized place: Evernote.

In the tip #2, I mentioned how to research for examples, quotes, and stats.

This tip is a mix of both previous tips, but instead of a writing or research focus, this one is about capturing every example you find and centralizing it onto a **swipe file**.

A swipe file is simply a place — a folder, most commonly — where you put all the information that catches your attention and that you think you will use somewhere in the future.

I can't tell you how many times I've saved an article thanks to having an image that proves a point of mine in my swipe file. Or to use an email example from my "Emails Campaign" folder. Or thanks to a bookmark in a special folder.

There are three swipe files I recommend you create:

A Folder

This is the most basic of all the folders, and as you can imagine, it requires you to click the right button of your mouse or pad and click the "New folder" button.

You then name that folder with the creative name of "Swipe file" and you keep all your images in that place.
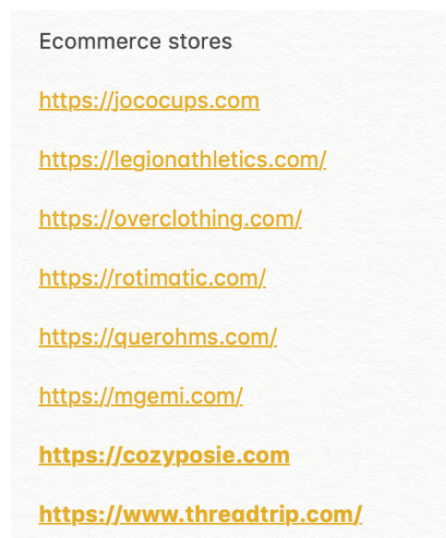
This is an example of mine:

As you can see, I have a mix of every type of marketing material: ads, landing pages, social media posts — you name it.

This gives me a wide range of examples I can use whenever I need them.

A Bookmark (or Note) Folder

The second is works exactly like the one before, but you save all the websites or pages that you believe will be useful in the future.
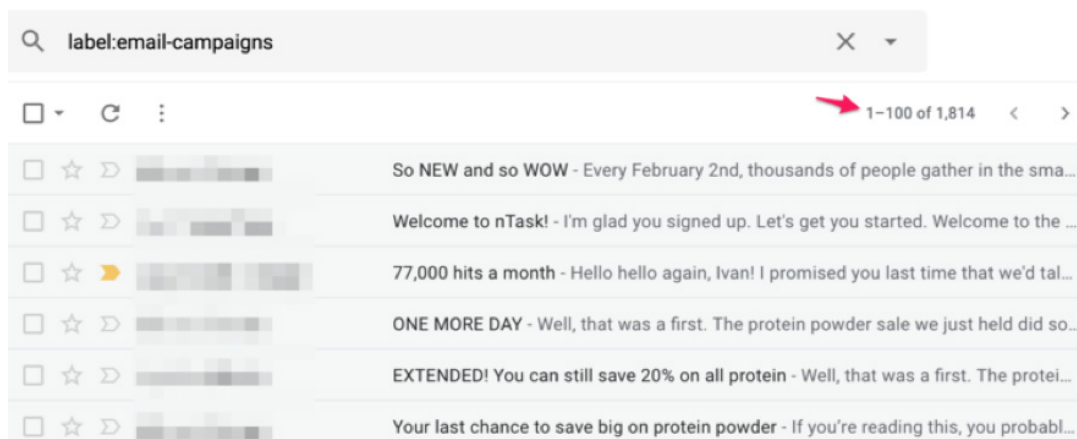
You can choose between saving all your examples in a bookmark or in a note file. In my case, I like the latter, something that has helped me immensely whenever I need lots of examples for my ecommerce and Instagram pieces that I write at Foundr.

Ecommerce stores

https://jococups.com

https://legionathletics.com/

https://overclothing.com/

https://rotimatic.com/

https://querohms.com/

https://mgemi.com/

https://cozyposie.com

https://www.threadtrip.com/

An Email Folder

Finally, one that I highly recommend if you work mostly on the marketing field is to have an email folder. I called mine "Email Campaigns," but honestly, it'd be much better if I segmented this folder with other ones like, "Sales Campaigns," "Promotion Campaigns," and "Informational Campaigns."

Still, I've gotten many great examples of marketing campaigns I could eventually copy or marketing techniques that I can use.

label:email-campaigns

1–100 of 1,814

So NEW and so WOW - Every February 2nd, thousands of people gather in the sma...

Welcome to nTask! - I'm glad you signed up. Let's get you started. Welcome to the ...

77,000 hits a month - Hello hello again, Ivan! I promised you last time that we'd tal...

ONE MORE DAY - Well, that was a first. The protein powder sale we just held did so...

EXTENDED! You can still save 20% on all protein - Well, that was a first. The protei...

Your last chance to save big on protein powder - If you're reading this, you probabl...

Writing Tip #12

Forget the Words — Think about the Outcome

In tip #5, I talked about organizing your content output by defining the number of words to hit daily and work your way backwards.

This tip plays the devil's advocate. 😈

I will be blunt: *no one cares about the number of words you write per day.*

What matters is you write the right words and you get the results you want.

Don't think on the number of words you write every day, think on the *outcome.*

For example, the goal of this piece isn't to write as many words as I can on the subject; the goal is to help you write better.

If I can achieve that goal in 1,000 words, so be it. If I can do it in 10,000 words, great. But what I think when I write is on my goal: *helping you write better.*

I still believe that you need to organize your work and hit a minimum of words per day. When you're first getting started, such consistency will help you get develop the writing habit.

As soon as you feel comfortable writing every day and hitting the minimum word count, you need to think on the outcome.

Writing isn't a matter of words written (I'd be a millionaire by now if that was the case 😅), but the quality of the work.

Writing Tip #13

Avoid Clichés

Clichés are everywhere.

They're the *"elephant in the room," "the bread and butter"* of our craft, the *"cheap shot"* of desperate people who lack the writing tools to express themselves with clarity and purpose.

It's not a conundrum; it's a *"catch-22."*

It's not a mistake, it's a *"bad call."*

"Excuse my french," but I have to call BS to clichés.

Whenever you use a cliché, you're trying to say something but lack the words to say it *"loud and clear."*

In each and every cliché I've used in this writing tip, I could have either use a clearer expression or avoid them altogether.

In the second sentence, I could have said:

> *They're overused. They're a common element in our craft. They're an easy tool used by desperate people who lack the writing tools to express themselves with clarity and purpose.*

I could have also written:

It's a conundrum. It's a mistake. Clichés are BS.

Much more powerful, isn't it?

Despite my lack of love for clichés, under some circumstances clichés can be useful.

For example, if you're trying to be corny on purpose, like I am now, you can use them. You can use them when you're trying to portrait someone who's cheesy as to use them in there speaking. You can use them to become more personal with the reader.

But unless you know what you're doing, avoid clichés "like the plague."

As William Zinsser puts it in his book On Writing Well TK:

> *Clichés are the enemy of taste.*
>
> *Extend the point beyond individual clichés to your larger use of language. Again, freshness is crucial. Taste chooses words that have surprise, strength and precision.*

This is your "wake up call." Stop "beating a dead horse" with clichés and start using clear expressions.

(Yes, I'm aware I went overhead with these clichés, but I couldn't resist.😃)

Use the "10% Rule" for Editing

When you write, it's easy to let your muses take you and make you write things that may not be the best for the reader.

It's hard to know what to edit: there are things that, while not useful, look great and make you feel proud of being a writer. There are other things that add a lot of context yet distract the reader from the main points of your piece.

How can you know what to edit?

Use the **10% editing rule**.

After you've finish writing your piece, you **cut 10% of the total word count**.

It seems harsh to cut 10%, but remember that the reader doesn't care about you, he cares about himself. The more you take out, the clearer your piece will become.

This rule isn't mine, mind you. I took it from Stephen King, who took this rule from his high school editor:

Formula: 2nd Draft = 1st Draft – 10%.

That is, you write the first draft. When you pick it up to rewrite it, you take out 10% of it and you're done.

Roy Peter Clark suggest starting by cutting:

1. *Any passage that does not support your focus.*
2. *The weakest quotations, anecdotes, and scenes to give greater power to the strongest.*
3. *Any passage you have written to satisfy a tough teacher or editor rather than the common reader.*

In my experience, the cut pieces usually include:

- Unnecessary long intros and conclusions
- Contextual explanations
- Technical ideas that don't make the point
- Stories
- Lengthy example explanations (if there's an image, let it speak for itself)

After you've cut the big stuff, you can go for the smaller one; the one that adds "punch" to your content. Clark recommends thinking about the following elements:

- *Adverbs that intensify rather than modify: just, certainly, entirely, extremely, completely, exactly.*
- *Prepositional phrases that repeat the obvious: in the story, in the article, in the movie, in the city.*
- *Phrases that grow on verbs: seems to, tends to, should have to, tries to.*
- *Abstract nouns that hide active verbs: consideration becomes considers; judgment becomes judges; observation becomes observes.*
- *Restatements: a sultry, humid afternoon.*

Of course, this isn't a hard rule; there are cases where 5% will do, and there cases where you have to cut 50% (this piece was meant to be +10K words long, but I cut it in half to make it easier to digest). Also, there's an obvious diminishing return for this rule, that's why 10% seems conservative once you think about it.

Once you start using the 10% rule, your content will look leaner, clearer, and easier to read. Your muses will hate you, but the reader will thank you.

Writing Tip #15

Become a Relentless Promoter

One marketer once said "content is 20% writing, 80% promotion."

While I don't agree entirely, it's true that if you want to become a content writer (freelancer or not), you need to promote your content. TK

A recent study TK by Buzzsumo and Backlinks found X% of posts never get a single link. MORE

That means, you have little chances of getting your content anywhere unless you promote it.

There are countless ways you can do it:

- Email marketing
- Facebook ads
- Email outreach
- Social communities
- Retargeting

What's truly important is that you spend as much time as you write your piece — if not more — promoting your content.

Think about it this way: if you put a lot of effort into creating your piece, if you are truly a proud writer and you have something very useful and interesting to say, you want people to read it. You're doing them a favor.

Your content promotion should always start with that **abundance mentality**, one that puts you in a position of authority and respect.

If you read content marketing content, you will see some people saying you need to do a dozen different tactics at the same time.

> *"Outreach 2,000 sites, and write 10 blog posts for 5 Facebook communities, and engage on Reddit, and build a Facebook ads campaign...yada, yada, yada."*

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Keep it simple. If you're promoting your company's content and you've got enough resources to promote it like those marketers say, then by all means do it. But if you don't, then **focus on one or two tactics.**

In my case, I like doing email outreach to improve my organic rankings. It's what I like and what I'm good at.

That's why I spend 20 minutes every day searching for new link prospects. It doesn't take me more than that, but it's what separates me from other marketers who write all the time and let their die in the soulless pit of the web.

Do your readers a favor and **promote your content.**

Writing Tip #16

Own Your Opinions

As a writer, it's your moral responsibility to have strong opinions about your industry, about your profession, and about almost everything.

It's easy to fall into the "imperative trap" of giving tips and tricks in every opportunity you have and forgetting that those to whom you're giving them away are people who want to connect with you.

If you have strong opinions, you will become a "thought leader" in your space. People will look up to you. Some won't like you, some will criticize you, but that's what happens when you stand out. You will get picked on.

Own Your Opinions

If Donald Trump became president through polarization and controversy, you too can get places — even if you don't want to build a wall or start a trade war with China.

Some clients won't like your content. Whether it's your ideas, your tone, or whatever, they will not like it.

If your opinions come from within, then let it go; it's *their problem.*

Own Your Ideas and Earn Your Respect.

As Roy Peter Clark says, *"Ultimately the product that any writer has to sell is not the subject being written about, but who he or she is."*

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