

The Five Neglected Elements of Successful Writing

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To be a good writer it is not enough to be technically or stylistically good. To be truly successful, the product of one's work must be *valued*. This oft-neglected aspect is as much a function of the quality, style, and subject matter of the piece as it is who reads it. The following five elements address this concept briefly and, when taken with the traditional factors taught in college writing courses, can have a dramatic impact on the reading experience for the audience and the resulting success of the writer.

When writing anything—a book, article, report, brochure, case study, position paper, or even a speech—consider the following five points:

1. Attract

Write for, and later market to, the broadest possible audience that could find value in your piece. For instance, when including technical material in a story, limit such descriptions to a paragraph or so at a time or risk losing non-technical readers. The same point applies when marketing the work you created. Be careful with cover copy, press releases, websites, social networks, and even the words you use when being interviewed, so that you attract the highest percentage of the audience you seek.

2. Qualify

Of those initially drawn to the piece, filter out the ones who do not need it and who could neither positively nor negatively affect its success. Invariably, some people will pick up a book or datasheet that is really not appropriate for them. Being respectful of their interests and needs by helping them quickly and easily decide to put it down will protect the overall perceived value of the work. This can easily be done through carefully chosen and clearly stated words at the beginning. The result will be a higher percentage of readers who appreciate the piece, who therefore will be more likely to speak well of it.

3. Retain

Ensure that the final, qualified audience reads your piece through to completion. This is especially critical for books—more than half of those started are not read to the end, and the readers who stopped can have a significant effect on your success. First, they will not recommend the book to others. Second, some people will go further and actually denounce it. Successful retention is a combination of properly qualifying the audience to begin with and, of

course, writing something that is worth finishing.

4. Reward

Upon completion each reader should feel rewarded. This can be accomplished through the acquisition of knowledge, the determination of what model of product to order, or simply the generation of strong emotions from a moving tale. Only then will they be likely to spread the word about your work and reach for the next piece you produce.

5. Inspire

With those who read through to the end, the *raison d'être* for your efforts comes into play. With a book they should be inspired to tell others to read (buy) it. With a case study they should go ahead and place an order for your product. With a political position paper the reader should have adopted a new perspective and vote accordingly. This, therefore, is where your writing succeeds or fails.

Many writers feel that their work is its own value. They are *wrong*. The world is full of poor writers who produce prose of beauty, and that end up like the tree that falls unheard in the woods. Every time you begin a new document, incorporate the five principles mentioned above and you could dramatically increase your audience, an audience that will want more from you.