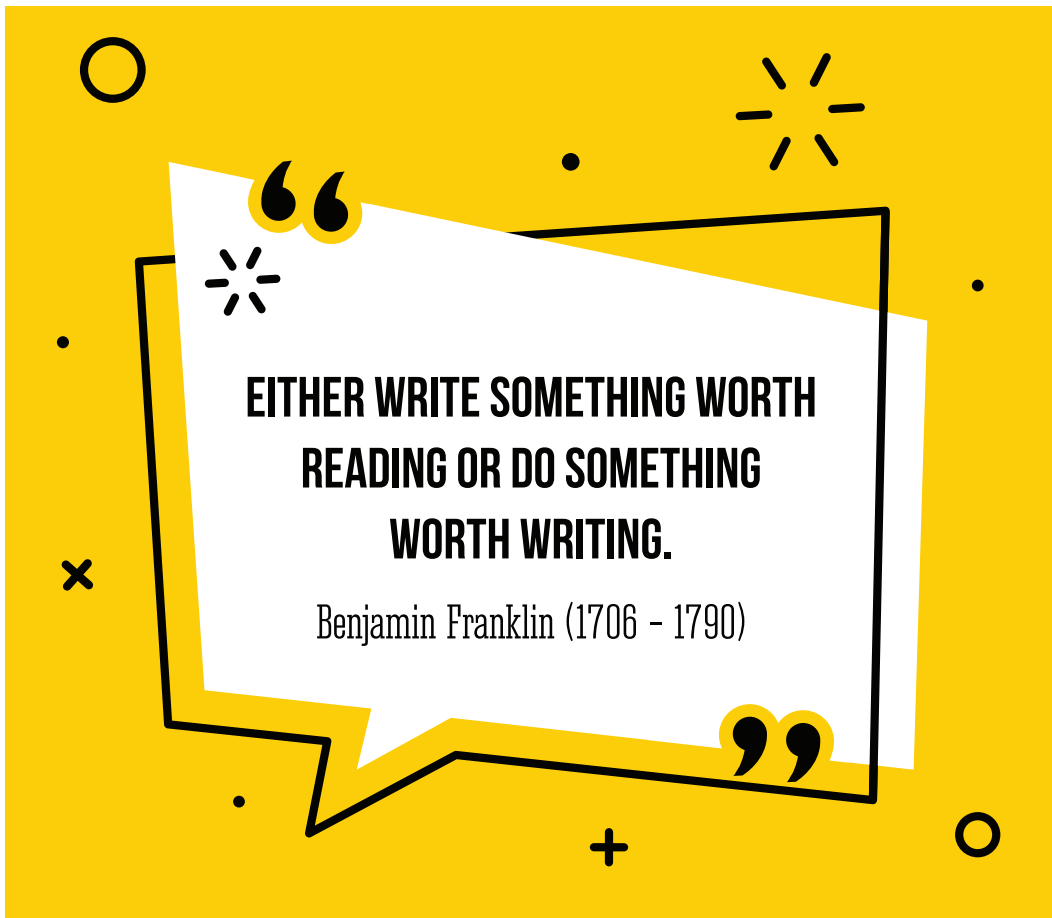


PRINT MATTERS

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Wow them with your writing

We have all read books that are impossible to put down.

Those types of books seize us from the beginning and refuse to let go until the very end. And though it might seem like a tall order, we are going to suggest that your articles should be that compelling too.

We know this is a daunting assignment; writing is a tough gig. It requires great intellect, concentration and creativity. Some are blessed with this gift from the womb; others have to work at it. But we think you're up for the challenge.

So this of course begs the question — how do these phenomenal writers do it? How do they draw us in and hold us captive? For answers, we turned to several seasoned writers. Here's what they had to say.

Draw them in...

For Houston-based freelance writer Tracey Timpanaro, who has 30 years of experience, it's all in the approach. "Great writing comes from people who are themselves fully engaged and then their passion flows easily from their pens," she says. "That level of enthusiasm quite naturally draws readers in."

Flori Meeks, also a Houston-based freelancer with 30 years of experience, says the way the information is presented is the key to engaging readers. "Don't do an information dump at the start of the article," she says. "Build a little suspense instead of telling everyone everything they need to know before you have a chance to draw them in. Work some storytelling elements into your narrative that pique readers' curiosity."

Naturally, it all begins with your lead. "You have to start out with a big whammy or a teaser," says Ella Ritchie, founder of Stellar Communications Houston, a book publisher that also offers business writing services. "It should be short and punchy, and then you go back and fill in the rest of the details in the body of the article."

Trade and hobby magazines already have audiences who are very interested in their content, but Meeks maintains you still have to be creative in the way you present information. "You are competing with so many other forms of media — other magazines, TV, radio, and social media. Your readers only have so much time, and you have to grab them while you can," she says.

Good conversation

Another aspect to consider is the way you approach your interviews. Being interviewed is uncomfortable for many people, and subjects are often concerned about how they will look in print. "They are always worried they will sound stupid," Meeks says. "I work hard to get them to let their guard down and make it more conversational. The best quotes are the ones that capture their personality, and they're more quotable when they're relaxed."

SAMPLES OF GREAT WRITING

We thought it would be instructive (and fun!) to share some samples of writing that we love. We chose these snippets because they drew us in with their strong writing, their sense of curiosity, or a line that made us laugh out loud. We hope you are duly inspired.

Why Houston is better than Dallas

By Ken Hoffman
Houston Chronicle • April 16, 2015
(reason #7)

Houston has been named "Coolest City in America" by Forbes. OK, so Forbes may not be the top arbiter of "cool." It's like having your father buy you a "cool" car, and it's a used Hyundai with 140,000 miles on it. But Dallas has never won it, and we'll take it. We're just spiking the ball in the end zone now.

Locally extinct rhino is back in Chad

By Sandra E. Garcia
New York Times • May 13, 2018
(lead)

Pigs don't fly yet, but rhinos do.

Six black rhinoceroses were flown from South Africa to Zakouma National Park in Chad last week, reuniting the threatened animal with a land it has not roamed in nearly five decades.

Selling sneakers like they're diamonds

By Bee Shapiro
New York Times • May 13, 2018
(lead)

To walk into the 3,000-square-foot Stadium Goods store in the SoHo neighborhood of New York City is to be confronted by rows and rows of pristine, shrink-wrapped athletic footwear. Look closely and you might be a little stunned by the price tags.

On a recent afternoon, for instance, a pair of white Nike Jordan 1s by fashion designer Virgil Abloh (Off-White, Louis Vuitton), originally priced at \$190, was selling for \$2,750. (No wonder it was enclosed in a glass case.) Nearby was a rare pair of Adidas PW Human Race NMD TR, designed by musician Pharrell Williams. Price tag: \$12,350.

This is clearly not Foot Locker.



“Great writing comes from people who are themselves fully engaged and then their passion flows easily from their pens.”

– *Tracey Timpanaro*

And we should also talk about what happens when you have to cover a topic that is as boring as watching paint dry. “When I have a dry topic, I try to bring out the human side of my source,” Meeks said. “I ask them why the information is relevant and why it excites them. I ask why it makes a difference and how they felt when they made a particular breakthrough.”

Meeks would also like to address what happens when writers try to be too clever. “We writers live a lot inside our minds,” she says, “so don’t lose sight of the fact that what sounds captivating to you might not make sense to the reader. They may not get the message you’re trying to convey.”

She relays a story about something she wrote recently that she thought was very witty. “My editor had a completely different perspective and didn’t get my gist. So take some time after you’ve written something so that you can come back and read it with a fresh eye,” she said.

The bottom line is that all eyes are on you. Your readers are there because they want to be. However, ensuring that they stick around for the long term is up to you. Engaging them with phenomenal writing is an excellent way to do just that.

Hey let's cheer for France

By Wright Thompson
ESPN The Magazine • June 18, 2018
(paragraph from a 2018 World Cup article on Paul Pogba)

It's not all his fault. Most people can see that Pogba's free-flowing game doesn't fit with manager Jose Mourinho's conservative style. He's a sequined jacket in a hit man's closet. These could be his final days living in this house and city as he decides whether to run again or stay and fight for his future. Russia is coming at the perfect time for him. No other player on the planet needs the psychic reboot of a World Cup as much as Pogba. "He is at an important crossroads," says Mamadou's brother, "Papis" Magassa, who coached Pogba in their neighborhood in Paris.

'Joshua Tree' reflections: Andrew Dansby

By Andrew Dansby
Houston Chronicle • May 19, 2017
(paragraph from an article about rock band U2)

But the Edge's playing on "The Joshua Tree" — and the band's early recordings as well — was an interesting aberration for its era. He didn't set out to play with all the candy colors in the crayon box, befitting an '80s guitarist. He instead worked with every possible shade of gray, adding embellishment to the songs' margins instead of fretting about carrying a song from a chorus to the bridge with a solo. He made his instrument sound like the whoosh of an airplane taking off on "Bullet the Blue Sky." A bright little figure repeats and repeats on "In God's Country," about as close as the album gets to a solo.

Blaming sick people does not lower drug prices

By Andie Dominick
The Des Moines Register • July 4, 2017
(conclusion of an editorial column)

People who do everything right are still diagnosed with cancer. And epilepsy. And heart disease. And diabetes. The medications they need to stay alive should be affordable. That was the point of the original editorial. That should be the issue elected officials focus on addressing.

Not blaming sick people for being sick.

The great and powerful Oz

By Jeff Gremillion
Houston CityBook magazine • April 2017
(lead on travel article on Australia)

The kangaroo is in there somewhere.

When you visit Australia to explore its food and wine culture, you expect at some point to be asked to eat kangaroo. And now the marsupial-munching moment — as you sit in a corner banquette at Attica, almost planetarium-like in its dark blue and black interiors — is nigh.

Great White: deep trouble

By Peter Benchley
National Geographic • April 2000
(lead on article on Great White sharks)

"Haai op die aas." Spoken casually, without a hint of alarm, the words meant nothing to me: a puff of incomprehensible Afrikaans. But the crew suddenly tensed, and their tenseness was contagious. Conversations stopped. Cameramen reached for their gear; the soundman rolled his tape. More than a dozen of us, crowded onto two tiny boats rafted together five miles off the tortuous shore of Gansbaai, South Africa, froze and watched the water.

Andre Hartman pointed aft to a spot a few yards behind the outboard motors. "Haai op die aas," he said again, and this time his meaning was clear. "Shark on the bait."

My place. Don't you just love it?

By Joanne Kaufman
New York Times • May 13, 2018
(lead)

It wouldn't be wrong to say that Antonina Munz FitzGerald likes her apartment building, but what a pale declaration. You might just as well say that Kim Kardashian likes her Instagram account.

Publisher's Corner

From the other side



Editor's note: Publisher's Corner usually features stories from seasoned journalists. This month, we thought it would be fun to see what life is like when a non-writer is asked to (gasp) pen a newsletter column for an organization to which she belongs. Here is her story.

It was just another day on the tennis court for Tawn Vo, but then she got the call.

Vo, who plays tennis four days a week, is a member of the Houston Tennis Association (HTA). HTA has 10,000 members and publishes a monthly newsletter online. One of its columns, Captain Spotlight, is written by a team captain from one of the association's league teams. The league's communications director asked if she was interested in being featured.

"I was just shocked," Vo said. Once she recovered, she immediately sought counsel from two teammates, one of whom is an editor. Vo's friends enthusiastically encouraged her to write the column. "If the two of them said I should do it, I reasoned, then I should do it," Vo said.

But then came the hard part — figuring out what to write. "I read previous issues of the newsletter, and knew I wanted to write something original," she said. "Back in the old days, when I had to write something in college, we were taught the Roman numeral outline, so that's where I started."

Vo, who is Vietnamese, also worried about how it would sound, since English is her second language and she doesn't have much writing experience. "I was very concerned it would reflect what a weak writer I am," she laughs.

She need not have worried, as she knocked it out of the park. The communications director said it was the best submission they had received, and the tennis community sang her praises as well. One opponent even joked about getting her autograph.

"I had stressed about it big time, and I was very pleased with the way it turned out," Vo said. "With all the time and energy I put into this sport, it was nice to be rewarded in some way."



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