



Checklist for Making Your Writing Shine



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Check your writing against this list to make sure it communicates as clearly and persuasively as possible. Never expect an editor or agent to polish your work or take it to the next level for you. Here's how to give your writing the pizzazz that will cause readers to invest in it, engage with it, and be entertained, convinced, and inspired by what you have to say.

1. Write from your heart as well as your mind.
2. Write in the active voice. Choose strong, active verbs.
3. Write concretely, rather than abstractly. Show, don't just tell. Appeal to all the senses.
4. In nonfiction as well as fiction, use storytelling as much as possible.
5. Stay in a definite, consistent POV. Through whose eyes is the reader seeing?
6. Hook the reader on the first page/ first paragraph/ first sentence/ first word.
7. Keep the reader's attention as each word, each sentence, each paragraph, each chapter leads to the next.
8. Maintain a logical or chronological flow of thought or action. Use transitions when needed.
9. Strive for precision and conciseness. Cut extraneous/ repetitious words and phrases. Less is often more.
10. Give thought to word choices, considering subtleties, connotations, nuances; find the zing of the right word.
11. Vary sentence structure and length. Use periodic sentences often. (I'll give you another handout for this.)
12. Search for and remove troublesome words that hide like gremlins in your writing, words that are used compulsively but aren't needed. I'll give you my list. You can add your own.
13. Use your ear. Read your writing out loud.