

**The Art of Articulate Writing – Mary L. Campbell
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Has God placed a desire within your heart to write? There are few joys greater than sensing God's Holy Spirit moving through us to touch the lives of others. One way He does this is to anoint and direct our words, both spoken and written, to change the lives of men and women. When we begin to sense that God is calling us to honor Him through writing, there is a process that must take place, beginning with spiritual preparation.

Preparation

We must first renew our personal dedication to the Savior and completely surrender all our abilities and talents to God. We need pure hearts and a passion to glorify Him to truly touch the reader's heart and mind. Next, it is necessary to discipline ourselves to spend more time in His presence and reading His Word. This is the only way we can truly know His heart and be able to express it in words. As we focus and meditate on the Scriptures we read daily, they become part of us and will flow into our writing in a natural way. We must write from the overflow of our heart, rather than just looking for a Scripture to include after writing a piece.

Everyone who has ever been used by God in a powerful way has chosen to draw near to Him. Sensitivity to His presence comes from spending significant time with Him on a regular basis. Today, I can recognize my husband's walk from a distance when I can't even see his face. Even when he is totally out of sight, I not only recognize his voice, I even know his cough. This is because we have spent many years together in the intimacy of a wonderful marriage. If we want to know God and hear His voice easily, we must spend more time with Him.

Focus on Readers

It is important to focus primarily on the needs of our readers, rather than our own personal skills in writing. When we do this, everything changes. We become so consumed with the truths or message that we, as the messengers or writers, are overshadowed. How do we want the readers changed after reading what we have written? What does God want to say through us? This doesn't mean that we shouldn't constantly be polishing and improving our writing skills. We need always to continue to improve our written communication so God's message can flow through us more effectively and not be diluted by our limited writing ability. However, when readers complete reading our work, we want them to feel blessed and touched by God, rather than being overly aware of our skill as an author. We must seek to be a channel through which He can communicate truth to others. By spending time with Him, we become increasingly sensitive to the anointing of the Holy Spirit and are led by Him more easily.

Sharpen writing skills

Once we have concentrated on spiritual preparation, we can move toward sharpening and improving our writing skills. There is no substitute for practice. The more we write, the easier and better it becomes. Some people like to journal as a way to articulate their

thoughts. Others often write out their prayers. I have found this is a wonderful way to pour out my heart to God. Some of my most precious moments with Him have been in front of my computer with tears streaming down my face while I typed Him a prayer. When we are preparing to teach, it is helpful to write out the lessons. This improves both our writing and speaking processes. Use your writing abilities to help others by assisting missionaries with their newsletters or pastors composing letters to the congregation. God is pleased when we totally submit our gifts to Him to use as He pleases. It is truly amazing what God can do when we are not overly concerned about who receives the credit.

There are numerous other methods of improving our writing efforts. Reading enhances our written communication. It is especially beneficial to read Christian books and articles from magazines in which we may be interested in being published. In this way we learn how others phrase their thoughts and for what type of articles these magazines are looking. Take advantage of professional growth opportunities such as attending writing conferences and workshops. Take courses in journalism or creative writing whenever it is possible. Buy a good grammar book, a thesaurus, and an extensive dictionary. Ask your friends and colleagues to help you critique and polish your work. My husband is an excellent proofreader and my very best critic.

Articulate writing often requires interviewing people and doing research in advance. Develop a filing system to organize and store information so it can be retrieved later. It is necessary to set up a system for this, so thoughts and ideas are not lost during the writing process. It is also helpful to keep a tablet and tape recorder close by at all times to jot down ideas and notes as they come to us.

The Writing Process

Once you have prepared spiritually and begun a systematic writing improvement plan, turn your attention to the writing process itself. First, determine your strengths and areas of expertise. We write best from what we know through first-hand experience and training. It is important to determine your passion. What experiences has God brought you through that might be informative or encouraging to your readers? You might have a special ministry of prayer, encouraging faith in others, or guiding children during transitions. Perhaps God uses you to counsel and disciple parents of children or youth. Your passion and expertise could be building strong marriages or reaching out to those facing heartbreak and crisis situations. God may have dropped a powerful vision in your heart for the future, or you might have a testimony that would be a great blessing to others. God has created each of us with unique gifts, experiences, and insights that can bless and touch the lives of others. We have a message that God wants us to tell!

Publication

When seeking publication, don't write first then seek a publisher. Instead, tailor your writing to meet the publisher's guidelines and policies. The [Christian Writers' Market Guide](#) is published each year and is a wonderful source of information about Christian publishers and their specific requirements. [Writer Speaker.Com](#) is a book and also a website that provides Internet research and marketing information for writers and

speakers. Between these two books, you will find hundreds of Christian publications and publishers. They are looking for someone to write for them. Once you have identified potential publishers, it is important to read their materials and the publications in which you are interested in writing. Notice the style, format, and topics they print. What age are their readers? Many publications will provide information about their requirements, which can be requested. Writing must meet the editors' needs in order to be published. It must also be submitted in the manner they request.

If you are invited to write an article, it is still vital to be sure you understand the topic and style desired. Learn about the audience needs and educational levels. Get information about the focus desired, writing style preferred, deadlines, editing requirements, length of article desired, and correct format for submission. Before beginning to write, gather all the information that will be needed. Complete necessary interviews and save information in notes or on tape. Gather information from the Internet and/or library.

Determine your message

Before beginning writing, state in one sentence what you want to say. In his book, Effective Magazine Writing, Peter C. Palms said that this step is invaluable. He also said that a magazine article should focus on one topic or subject so if you need two or more sentences to state your message, you probably have material for two or more articles.

Next, write an introduction or lead statement that captures the readers' attention and draws them into the article. It might begin with a variety of different approaches such as: a thought provoking question, an anecdote, an action statement, a powerful quote that relates to the article, a personal statement that touches the heart, or startling information that peaks interest. Write carefully to provoke curiosity and interest in the information to follow. This is the most important part of the piece and should accurately represent the heart of the article while also drawing in the reader. Pray for God to give you special insight and skill to speak to the needs of your readers as you prepare this.

Prepare an outline

Outlines are essential. They help us organize information in a wonderfully cohesive manner so we can identify what is missing or duplicated. If you begin without an outline, you will spend far more time trying to organize and develop the article later. It is better to develop a more extensive outline than you need and condense it later, than for it to be too brief. Later, if you are asked to speak on the topic, your outline can become your notes for the presentation.

The first draft

You are ready to write when you have the following: 1) your article idea, 2) your statement of the meaning of your article in a single sentence, 3) all researched material from the library and the Internet, 4) resources from your notebook, 5) an outline. (Effective Magazine Writing, Roger C. Palms).

Begin writing. Following your outline, select the first point and begin writing your thoughts and ideas as quickly as you can. Don't worry about spelling, grammar, and

details. Don't stop to try to refine and polish at this point or you may lose your momentum and get discouraged. Continue to move through the outline as rapidly as possible, using the same process. The hardest part is now over, getting started!

Refining and Polishing

Your second draft will be easier. It is always easier to refine something that is already written than to start with nothing. Check your grammar and punctuation. Verify Scripture references and quotes. Add material that seems lacking and rearrange as needed. Begin polishing in your third draft. Look carefully at word choices and sentence construction to see if these can be strengthened and improved. Take out unnecessary and weak words. Eliminate clichés.

In later drafts, continue to improve the flow of the article and the transitions between paragraphs. Be sure one paragraph moves smoothly into the next to carry the reader along. Shorten sentences and cut out adjectives and adverbs as much as possible. Instead, choose the very best word to express your thoughts. Long sentences can become tedious and less interesting. Vary sentence length to lend variety and interest. Read every Scripture reference to be sure it is quoted correctly. Double-check grammar, checking contractions, and agreement between plurals and singulars. Be sure the language is easily understood and does not draw attention, detracting from the message of the piece. Use the present tense and active voice as much as possible. Set your work aside for a day or two, then read it again from a fresh perspective and begin again.

The conclusion

Both the beginning and the end of written pieces are critically important. The first draws readers into the piece, and the last helps them to remember it in a unique way. What is the purpose of the article? What is the purpose you believe God wants you to impart to the reader? Ask God to help you close the article in a way that will reinforce His purpose and impact the readers.

If you are reading this article, you are probably already publishing or sensing that God is leading you into writing. You may feel that the task is too big or your abilities and experience too limited. Fortunately for all of us, God is not limited by our abilities. Our weakness is made perfect in His strength (2 Corinthians 12:9). Commit your gifts and talents to him and trust Him as He uses your words to communicate truth and capture the hearts and lives of others. Don't be afraid to step out as God begins to open doors. Practice, practice, and practice some more. Sharpen your skills and remember, "A word aptly spoken (or written) is like apples of gold in settings of silver" (Proverbs 15:11 *NIV*). Let God use you and your written words to impact lives for His glory.

References

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