

The power of words

 By [James Hurford](#)

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In South Africa, there are over 4.7 million people who are completely illiterate as they've never had a day's school in their lives. A further 4.9 million are semiliterate to the point that the written word has no benefit to their quality of life. That means 9.6 million people are technically illiterate in South Africa - nearly 20% of the population.

Literacy plays a vital role in the growth and development of any nation, and research has shown that the higher the rate of literacy, the better the potential to succeed.

A high level of literacy can reduce poverty and crime, contribute to economic growth, and improve the quality of life of people.

People who write well do well

It's no coincidence that people who write well do well. Writing well is one of the best ways to advance your career, no matter what it might be.

If you can't write well - if you can't get your point across in a clear, concise and organised way - you have no choice but to spray and pray. Write with bad grammar, bad spelling and bad punctuation and no one is going to take you seriously.

Always take the time to write as well as you can

Good writing reflects you as well as your company. Write a sloppy email and you come across as a sloppy thinker.

By following a few simple rules you can dramatically improve your writing. And, with practice, it can set you on the path to being a much better writer. Every writer can get better, and no writer is perfect.

No matter what level of writer you are, here are a few secrets that can help you:

The secrets of good writing

1. "The secret of good writing is to strip every sentence to its cleanest components - *every word that serves no function, every long word that could be a short word, every adverb that carries the same meaning that's already in the verb, every passive construction that leaves the reader unsure of who is doing what* - these are the thousand and one adulterants that weaken the strength of a sentence." -William Zinsser

2. "The best writing is rewriting." - E.B. White
3. "The secret of good writing is to be concise, clear, and pointed, and not to think about your style at all." - Robert Southey
4. "The great secret of writing well is to know thoroughly what one writes about, and not to be affected." - Alexander Pope
5. "The secret of good writing is to say an old thing in a new way or a new thing in an old way." - Richard Harding Davis
6. "The ear is the only true writer and the only true reader." - Robert Frost
7. "If you can't write clearly, you probably don't think nearly as well as you think you do." - Kurt Vonnegut
8. "Nobody told all the new computer writers that the essence of writing is rewriting. Just because they're writing fluently doesn't mean they're writing well." - William Zinsser
9. "The only way I can get anything written at all is to write really, really terrible first drafts." - Anne Lamott
10. "If it sounds like writing, I rewrite it." - Elmore Leonard

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