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Writing Checklist

Writing involves developing your thoughts, then turning them into something readable. You can accomplish this by tackling your writing in a series of steps: Pre-writing, drafting, revision, and editing. By using this checklist, you can navigate these writing stages and immediately improve your copy.

Pre-writing: Do NOT skip this step!

- ☐ I know the purpose of my piece. My main idea is:_____
- ☐ I know how the piece will be consumed.
    - o Format (print, PDF, blog, etc.)_____
    - o Length (word count or character restrictions)_____
- ☐ I know who my audience is and the voice, tone, and language I should use.
- ☐ Research
    - o I have read relevant articles and documented URLs for linking.
    - o I have conducted all necessary interviews.
- ☐ Outline
    - o I have jotted down the points I need to cover.
    - o I have identified gaps in my research or thinking.
    - o If I have too much material, I have narrowed down the scope of my piece.

Writing your first draft. Just do your best. You can clean it up later.

- ☐ I have bound, gagged, and stuffed my inner critic in the closet.
- ☐ I have accepted the reality that no first draft is ever good.

Revision. Read your entire piece. If you can't check each box, revise it until you can.

- ☐ My ideas are clear and cogent.
- ☐ I have made my case.
- ☐ The piece makes sense.
- ☐ The structure is logical. If it isn't, I have rearranged sections or sentences.
- ☐ I have enough links to articles of interest or quotes from experts.
- ☐ My transitions keep the narrative flowing and the reader oriented.
- ☐ I have used subheads or bullets to break up long blocks of text.
- ☐ My paragraphs are not too short. (One or two short ones are good for emphasis. Too many annoy the reader.)
- ☐ My first paragraph has a strong hook.

Nitty gritty editing.

- ☐ I have eliminated wordiness. (Focus on the main culprits, including weak verbs, overused prepositions, and the passive voice.)
- ☐ I have used strong verbs to eliminate clunky adjectives and silly adverbs.
- ☐ I have struck unnecessary prepositions and clauses.
- ☐ I have deleted filler words (very, simply, just).
- ☐ I have replaced cliches and jargon with plain, accessible language.

Read your piece out loud.

- ☐ I have corrected for words I've overused.
- ☐ I identified and corrected typos and missing words.
- ☐ I varied my sentence structure and length.
- ☐ I pinpointed where the piece sags and tightened up the ideas/paragraphs/structure.

Get feedback. Have at least one person read your piece. Ask your test reader:

- ☐ Is anything confusing?
- ☐ Is there anything interesting that seems underdeveloped?
- ☐ Did they trip up over any sentences?
- ☐ Did it hold their attention?
- ☐ Where did their interest wane?
- ☐ Did they stumble across any grammatical errors or typos?

Listen graciously. Revise again if necessary.

Fact check and proofread. It's hard to catch your own mistakes when your brain knows what it wants to read. The following tricks help:

- ☐ I have printed out and read hard copy if possible.
- ☐ I have read my piece backwards.
- ☐ I have read it out loud again.
- ☐ If I used ChatGPT or other generative AI for anything at all, I have checked EVERY fact for accuracy.

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Need help with a project or want a writing consultation? Contact Laura Rose at **laurajrosewriter@gmail.com.**