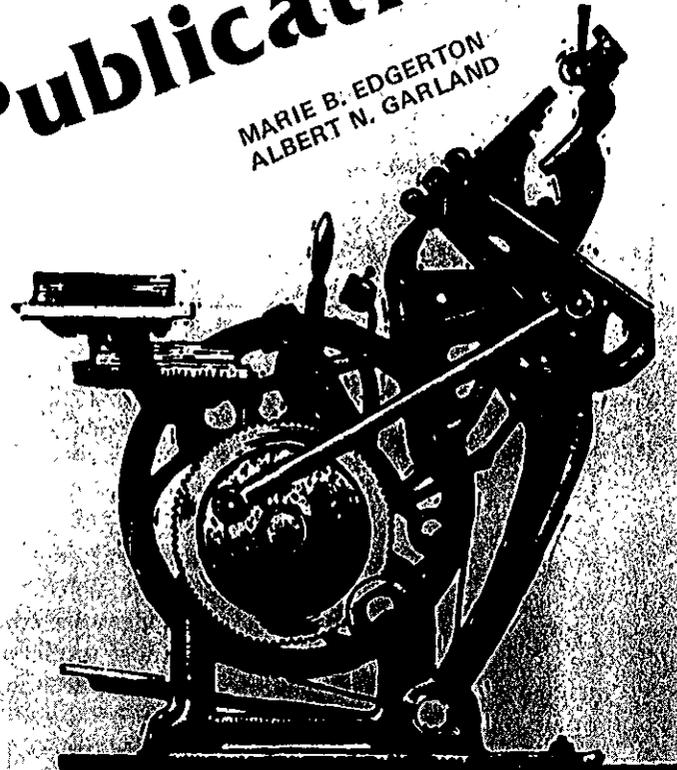


Writing For Publication

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Writing is certainly not at the top of the list of things Infantrymen like to do — especially writing articles for the Army's professional military journals, including **INFANTRY**.

And that's too bad, because the purpose of any professional journal is to transmit what one person in a given field knows to others like him who might need that information — to share ideas, stimulate thinking, and establish a mutually beneficial dialogue. And most Infantrymen — both commissioned and noncommissioned officers — by the time they've been in the Army for a while, have gained quite a bit of knowledge and experience that can be valuable to the Infantrymen who will come after them.

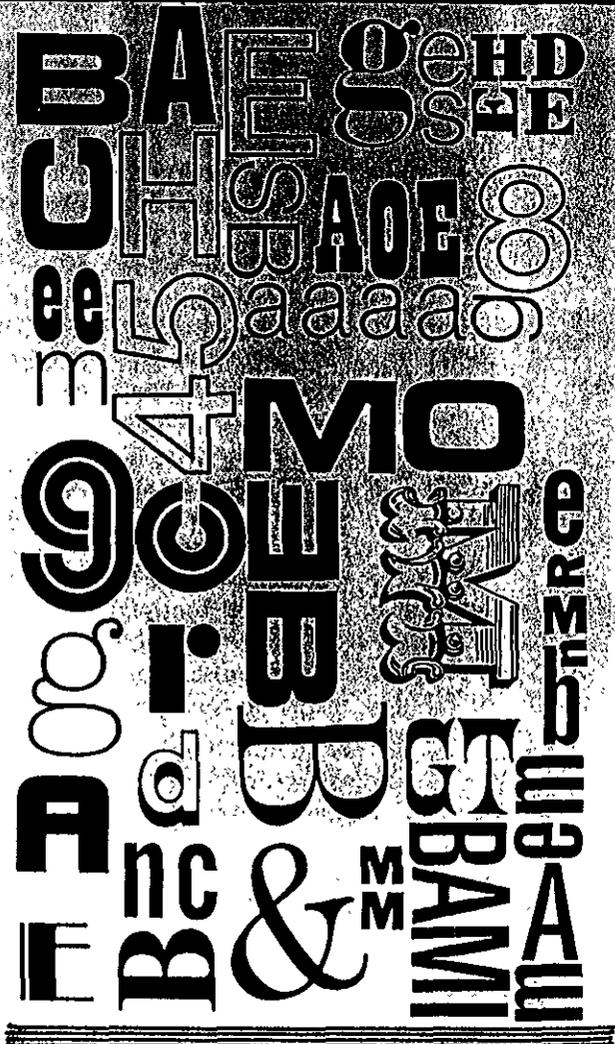
But it's hard to convince them that they should share that knowledge and experience in writing. There are any number of reasons for this reluctance, but during the years that we've worked together on this magazine's staff, we have concluded that most of them can be placed in four general categories.

First, some Infantrymen seem to think that writing, in any form, is an intellectual pursuit and they want no part of it. They didn't join the Army to write, they tell us, but to fight — or to train others to fight. Besides, they don't have time; they're too busy taking care of the details of everyday Army life. And they certainly have better things to do in the evenings and on weekends.

Other officers and NCOs don't care one way or the other. Writing doesn't particularly interest them. If they pass on their experience at all, it has to be to the soldiers nearest them. They're not really concerned with anyone else in the Army — at least not concerned enough to sit down and try to share their ideas in writing.

Then there are some who especially admire their own writing and refuse to submit articles to any magazine because they don't want their manuscripts edited. They have a hard time believing that an editor's only aim is to make their writing clearer to his magazine's audience.

And there is a fourth category of Infantrymen — those who would like to write for publication but who do not have any of the confidence of this former group. They worry about their ability to write and fear that their el-



forts will be ridiculed by some editor sitting in final judgement in a book-lined office someplace. So rather than face such ridicule and possible rejection, they do nothing about those articles that they have been thinking about.

So far, we haven't been able to do much with the people in the first three groups, though we've tried. As a result, we have directed most of our efforts toward the members of the fourth group — the officers and NCOs who want to write but don't think they can do an acceptable job of it. We have helped any number of first-time writers such as these get their articles ready for publication — either in *INFANTRY* or in another magazine — and nothing pleases us more.

We certainly intend to go on encouraging *all* Infantrymen to write for publication. That's part of our job, a big part. And for an officer or an NCO who wants to write but isn't quite sure how to go about it, we offer the following suggestions.

First, a prospective author should be aware that in a professional journal of any kind the most important consideration is the subject matter of an article. This is especially true of military publications. Each usually has its own particular reason for existing, a stated mission to accomplish through its pages — a specific category of material to cover and a specific group of readers to reach.

INFANTRY's mission, for example, is to publish material on Infantry organizations, weapons, equipment, tactics and techniques, and to provide a forum for the exchange of professional ideas. We also use some relevant historical articles, especially those with lessons learned that are still valid. Our primary audience is the company grade officer and the senior noncommissioned officer. If an article is submitted to us that does not somehow fit that mission or that audience, then we will probably either reject it outright or suggest another publication we think might be interested in it.

A prospective writer, therefore, should study the publication he wants to write for to see what kind of material it normally uses, and then he should write with that publication in mind. Or if he already has an idea for an article on a certain subject, he should look for just the right publication to submit the article to. (*In no case should he send it to more than one at a time. And he should always send an original manuscript, not a copy.*) But how can he find out what kind of material each wants?

He can go to the library, for one thing, and look at various magazines to get a feel for what they normally use. If he doesn't find the magazines there, he can at least get their addresses and write or call the ones he is considering. Most magazines offer sample copies to anyone who is interested, and most also have writers guides to send along. Most editors are also happy to discuss article ideas by telephone or by mail and to advise a writer on the best approach to use.

While a prospective writer is looking at various magazines to see what subject matter each covers, he should also look at the style of writing in each. Style may not be

easy for a new writer to detect, but he can usually tell, for example, whether the writing is formal or informal, serious or light, and whether the magazine uses scenarios, dialogue, or humor, for example.

Once he has done all this, an author must do his homework too. He must become well versed in his subject matter, using the nearest library facilities to fill in any gaps in his own knowledge. And he should not select a subject that is too broad. It is a rare person who can write an article without some preparation; and there is no one who can solve all the world's problems, or even all of one Infantryman's problems, in 2,000 words.

A military writer should be aware, too, that writing for a military publication is not the same as "military writing." The two are quite different, in fact, although we're not sure why that should be. Military writing, unfortunately, is stereotyped and usually follows certain prescribed steps with little deviation permitted. Much of it is filled with meaningless clichés and bureaucratic jargon that together make it essentially unintelligible except to insiders, and often even they find it difficult.

Writing for publication in a military journal, and especially in a civilian magazine, is another matter entirely. The author of a magazine article cannot force another person to read his material as the author of a "military paper" can. He must first attract that person's attention and then work hard to keep it. And he does this by making his writing tight, concise, and interesting — by coming through as a person expressing a human situation, a bit of reality with which a reader can associate himself as a person.

WARNINGS

Before he begins to write, there are a few more things a writer should know:

- Writing is not easy for most people. A writer's goal should be to make the *reading* easy; as a famous editor once put it, "Easy writing makes damn hard reading."

- Writing cannot be hurried. It must flow naturally in its own time. And it must follow the author's thoughts in a logical and progressive way.

- Writing is a lonely job. An author cannot share the experience until he has completed at least one draft of his article. No one else can help him write; it is a task that he must do alone.

- Writing requires patience. It requires the ability to sit at a desk or the dining table, or on the floor, to compose draft after draft. A writer should not expect to produce a finished product on the first try. He has to be ready to rework it again and again. If he does not, he can be sure that an editor somewhere will do it for him — assuming, of course, that the editor sees something valuable enough in the manuscript to bother doing it.

Even then, after all this work, his article may be rejected. Sometimes it will be a good article but at the wrong time or the wrong place. The article may be on a



subject that does not appeal to the editor who reads it at that particular time, or the editor may already have accepted a similar article. Rejection is a fact of life in the writing business. But it should not discourage a writer from trying again.

TECHNIQUES

Certain techniques are involved in good writing. The following are only a few of those we have found to be particularly useful.

First, an article should be complete. It should answer all the questions it raises — all the questions a reader might ask in connection with the specific topic. The writer accomplishes this chiefly by narrowing his topic down to something he can deal with satisfactorily in a magazine article.

The article should be coherent, meaning it should all “stick together.” In other words, it should have a definite point to make, and everything in it should lead to or support that point. And along the way, the author should say what he has to say simply, clearly, and directly. He should not wander; if he does, his reader will also wander, never to return.

The length of an article is a matter of personal choice, although magazines do usually have limits, both upper

and lower, on the length they will consider. Conciseness requires planning, but if a writer makes a reasonable effort to outline his ideas before he starts to write, he should be able to stay within the desired limits. One rule of thumb we use when talking with prospective authors is, “Say what you have to say and then stop. Don’t say it over and over again.”

A writer should not attempt dialogue unless he has had a great deal of experience with it. Good, realistic dialogue is difficult to write, even for the most experienced writer, and amateurish dialogue will turn an editor off quickly. (For us, the best turn-off is an opening scenario. In most cases, it only indicates that the writer did not know how to begin and used a scenario as a crutch.)

Footnotes are useful for certain types of articles. Separate bibliographies are also necessary if an article is based on historical research or on the findings of a board. But no manuscript should be cluttered with long quotations that only restate what the author is trying to prove. An author should be able to make his own case strongly enough with a minimum of outside help from authorities. Only especially astute or well-stated comments should be quoted directly, and the source of these should be given in the text.

An author should be as objective as possible about his subject. He should be careful not to base an article on assumptions that may not hold up. If everything he writes is dependent upon a neatly phrased premise that he states in the beginning, then he must first establish that premise as a fact.

He should be careful, too, about using superlatives, comparatives, and absolutes. Something he labels *the best*, for example, may be the best in his opinion only. And few things in the world are so absolute that an author can safely say that something is *always* this way or *never* that way. If he does, he must be prepared to support his contention.

In regard to “forum” articles — in which an author expresses his opinion on an issue — we recommend that a writer avoid criticizing the way something is done unless he has a good substitute solution to offer. Too many writers appear to have a personal axe to grind without really helping solve the problem. But that is not to say that every article must hew to the “party line,” the established doctrine. Most magazines welcome controversial articles, because such articles stimulate a healthy dialogue, not to mention a healthy interest in the magazines themselves.

Finally, any would-be author should be his own copy editor. Although editors expect to have some work to do in preparing an article for publication, an author will stand a better chance of having his article accepted if he will look at it as an editor might. Besides, by doing this, he can often make his thoughts clearer and thus avoid the possibility that the editor may unintentionally change his meaning in the process of doing the editing for him.

Over the years, we have read thousands of manuscripts, ranging from the very good to the very bad. As a

result, we have developed a number of writing tips that we think will benefit any military writer — if he uses them properly.

The tips that we have chosen to use here are especially intended to help a prospective author write simply, clearly, and concisely, because too much Army writing is the direct opposite of simple, clear, and concise. The examples used to illustrate these tips have been collected over the years from military writing found in various documents and publications.

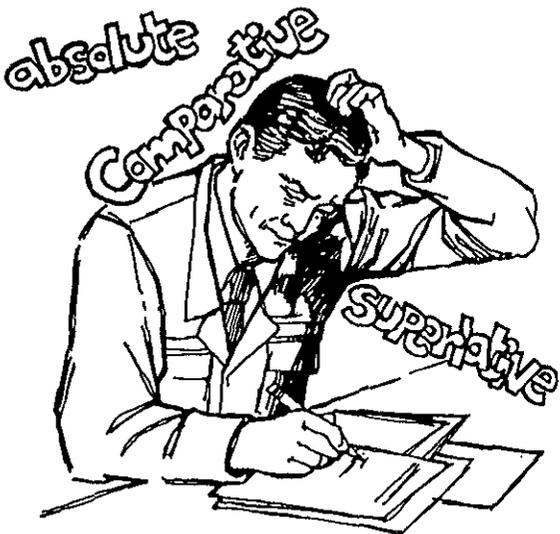
WRITING TIPS

Use the active voice. Although there are times when the passive voice is best — when, for example, the action itself is more important than who does it — the active voice is generally clearer and more concise. “It was ordered that . . .,” without saying by whom, may look like a dodge to avoid saying who ordered it. In any case, it certainly does not tell the reader who did it, and getting a real live person into a sentence almost always makes it more interesting and easier to read.

As another example, “The equipment was repaired by the soldiers,” does tell who, but “The soldiers repaired the equipment” is shorter and more straightforward. Writers should especially avoid the impersonal, stilted, and typically Army “It is regretted that,” saying instead simply “We regret,” or “The Army regrets . . .”

The use of the passive voice often leads to monstrous constructions such as this: “The mobilization of all available resources will be made.” Although it is somewhat better to say “All available resources will be mobilized,” this is still in the passive voice. Much better is the active, “We (or somebody) will mobilize all resources.”

Once a writer consciously decides to use the passive voice in a sentence, however, he must be consistent.



Switching from the passive to the active in mid-sentence leads to confusion, as this example illustrates: “The senior enemy air defense controller was taken out of the picture by cutting his communication cables.” The word “cutting” clearly requires someone to do the cutting, and the enemy air defense controller probably did not cut his own cables to take himself out of the picture.

There are two solutions to this problem: In the passive voice, “The . . . controller was taken out of the picture when his communication cables were cut.” Or, in the active voice, “(Someone) took the air defense controller out of the picture by cutting his communication cables.”

As this example also illustrates, it is sometimes impossible for an editor to convert a sentence to active voice, because he may not be able to figure out who the *doer* is supposed to be. Only the author can provide that information.

Make modifiers clear. A word or phrase that is used to modify another word or phrase must be placed so that the relationship between them is clear. This example from a post daily bulletin will illustrate: “Warning: Any toy chest used for storing toys with a hinged lid is a strangulation hazard to a small child.” The phrase “with a hinged lid” should go after the word “chest,” since the warning is about *chests* with hinged lids, not about *toys* with hinged lids. (Besides, the phrase “used for storing toys” is unnecessary; that is what a toy chest is for. In this case, then, taking out the intruding phrase solves the problem.)

The dangling participle, which has plagued English students throughout their school years, also falls into this category of misplaced or unclear modifiers. For example, “Walking by the motor pool, the truck hit the fence,” taken literally, means that the truck was walking by the motor pool. But a more likely meaning is, “As I was walking by the motor pool, I saw the truck hit the fence.”

Use parallel construction. Parallel construction means putting like elements in a sentence in the same grammatical form. In “preparing, coordination, and evaluation,” the word “preparing” does not agree with the others. All should have “tion” endings, or all should have “ing” endings. (The “ing” endings are best, incidentally, because verb forms are generally better to use than nouns.)

In a description of the U.S. flag, “red, white, and blue” are parallel — all adjectives — but “red, white, blue, and made of nylon” are not. The last item in the series is a phrase, not an adjective; therefore, it is not a true series.

This “false series” is the single most common error of parallelism. If three or four items are involved, many writers tend to treat them as a series without analyzing them for logic.

As another example, “He gave them orders, maps, aerial photographs and showed them a sand table of the command post.” An “and” before “aerial photographs” to complete that series, “orders, maps, and aerial photographs,” would help. (Despite popular belief, there is nothing wrong with using two *ands* that

close together in a sentence as long as it is not hard to read.) Another example, "The new M1 tank runs smoother, faster, and responds easier," is not as easy to solve. It might be better to say, "The new M1 tank runs smoother (more smoothly?), travels faster, and responds easier." But better still, "The new M1 tank is smooth-running, fast, and responsive."

Faulty parallelism is fairly easy to detect if a writer carefully reads what he has written and applies some logic to it. For example: "His job is developing training, doctrine, materials, and training the officers" presumably means "His job is to develop training doctrine and materials and to train the officers."

Use correct idioms. An idiom is an individual peculiarity of language — a construction that is generally accepted and widely understood but without any real grammatical basis. For example, we say "instead of going" but "rather than go," and even linguists cannot explain why.

Many idiomatically strange constructions have crept into Army writing recently: "Officers are charged to satisfy" and "are responsible to satisfy" appear with some regularity. But the normal idioms are "charged with satisfying" and "responsible for satisfying," and it seems strange to most readers to see them otherwise.

As another example, "to assist the boss to prevent" should be either "to assist the boss in preventing" or, better, "to help him prevent." We normally say, not "acquaint to" but "acquaint with," not "curiosity of" but

"curiosity about," not "permeated with" but "permeated by." (Such lists are available in many grammar books and style guides.)

Use transition devices. Transitions are words or phrases that let the reader know what direction the author is taking next. The most common of these are *and*, *but*, and *for*, but there are many others: *Consequently*, *therefore*, *however*, *nevertheless*, *subsequently*, *on the other hand*, *earlier*, *later*, *previously*, and so on. Often entire sentences must be used to provide transition. All of these devices help the reader keep track of what the author is saying without having to reread a passage several times. Such devices should be used in sentences, between sentences, between paragraphs, or between major sections of a piece of writing — anywhere there is a shift in the subject.

Be concise. *Concise* does not mean necessarily brief; it means saying everything that needs to be said to make a point clear but without any unnecessary words or phrases. The following examples include redundancies (using two or more words that mean the same thing) and general wordiness (using more words than necessary):

Instead of:	Try:
seems apparent	appears
new innovations	innovations (they <i>are</i> new)
many and numerous	many
final and ultimate	final (or) the last
around the perimeter	around (the line that goes around something <i>is</i> its perimeter)
skirt around	skirt (or) go around
important essentials	essentials (important by definition)
serious crisis	crisis (serious by definition)
at this point in time	now
until such time as	until
in the near future	soon
a sufficient amount of	enough
in a timely manner	on time
causal factors	causes
make provision for	provide for
is indicative of	indicates
be cognizant of	know
have the (cap) ability	be able
be in agreement	agree
give authorization	authorize
be in possession of	possess
give encouragement	encourage
serve the function of	
being	be



These are only a few of the many examples of redundancy and wordiness. To change the habit of writing this way, a writer first has to become aware of the problem; then he has to go back over what he has written to see whether he has used any words that need to be cut.

Use short, familiar words. Part of a writer's task is to choose the right word. And sometimes the longer words, such as those listed on the left below, are best, especially

in formal writing. But generally, the shorter, more familiar versions are just as good, and they are more concise. (In informal writing, the longer ones sometimes sound pretentious and stuffy.)

Instead of:	Try:
numerous	many
facilitate	ease
the remainder	the rest
individual	man, woman, soldier
sufficient	enough
provide	give
attempt	try
obtain	get
possess	have
desire	want
prior to	before
subsequent to	after
utilize	use
endeavor	try
myriad	many

(On this last item, *myriad* means many; therefore, *a myriad of*, which is used so much, makes no sense whatever.)

Above all, a writer should never use a word unless he is sure he knows the meaning of it. (If he really thinks about it, he usually does know; misuse comes more from carelessness than from ignorance.)

It is not uncommon, for example, to see *agenda* confused with *itinerary*, *defuse* with *diffuse*, *gleam* with *gleam*, *hone* with *home* (one *hones* skills, *homes* in on a target), *breach* with *bridge* (especially in *breaching the gap*, which, of course, is already breached), and *wreckless* with *reckless* (direct opposites, in fact, when talking about driving.) A pet peeve of ours is the word *enhance*, which seems to be a favorite these days. *Enhance* means to increase or augment, but normally it is applied to something that is already good, such as value or beauty. To speak of enhancing lethality (a questionable word in itself) is ludicrous. What's wrong with using *increase*? Or *improve*?

Avoid jargon. Many people in the Army (and in other specialty fields as well) become so accustomed to seeing jargon, which is a specialized use of language, that they adopt it for all their writing. But the only time jargon of any kind is acceptable in writing is when the writer knows

that all his readers will understand it. When a magazine goes to all kinds of people all over the world, he can be sure that many of them will *not* understand it. Any writer must therefore make a conscious effort to see that the words and phrases he uses are not only clear and concise but free of specialized uses of words that some will not understand.

Read and practice. Finally, anyone who seriously wants to write for publication should make it a habit to read everything he can. He will not only be stimulated by the ideas of others, he will also be exposed to the way those ideas are put together in writing. This, in turn, should make his own writing come easier.

He might even consider reading some of the many books on writing that are so popular now. One that has always been popular, and one that any writer would recommend, is *The Elements of Style*, by William Strunk, Jr., and E.B. White. It is concise and easy to read (its authors practice what they preach).

In addition to reading, a prospective writer should practice writing every chance he gets. Only through practice can he sharpen his skills. And in spite of all the advice in this article and all the implied criticism of the way so many people write, we do not object to having writers practice on us. Our purpose here is to encourage writers, not to discourage them.

The most important thing about an article is its contents — the message that it has for a magazine's readers. If we see something good enough in a manuscript that is submitted to us, no matter how much help the writing may need, we will help the author get it published, either by giving him specific instructions for rewriting it or by editing it for him.

These tips are designed to help the writer make that "something good" in a manuscript clearer and easier to get at so that we, or another editor somewhere, will want to publish it.

There is nothing more satisfying for a writer than to see his work in print. Even a much-published author feels much the same each time. And aside from this personal satisfaction, an Infantry officer or NCO who publishes an article can take pride in the fact that he has been able to contribute something to his profession and to his fellow professionals.

There is no better time to start than now. And we are here to help in any way we can. All it takes is a call or a letter.

