

JUST SAY IT

Advice for writers. And everyone else.

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it will feed the pen
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Copywriting is hard. Briefs are challenging. There are so many points to communicate. And so few characters to communicate them in. CDs have opinions. Clients have demands. Art directors want less words. Everyone wants more ideas. And somehow, you still want to embrace all of that and make something awesome.

Well, bad news: I don't have the silver bullet to make it easier. But good news: I do have a ton of amazing writers that I look up to who were willing to share their best advice.

Writers who are brilliant minds, stand up comedians, Chief Creative Officers, Partners at the best agencies in the world, CDs for the most iconic brands and the ultimate wizards of words.

I hope this collection of what worked best for the best in the game serves up some knowledge nuggets worth munching on.

—Taylor Black
CD, We Are Pi

1

JUST FUCKING
WRITE.

Just fucking write! That's how good writers solve everything. They have the discipline to just write. Write when they don't feel like it. Write when you have writer's block. Write when you're tired. Write when you feel like everything you're writing down is shit.

The best way to practice the craft is to sit down and do it. Sometimes just typing out the words to a VO you've heard on another commercial is enough to teach you something or get your brain firing in a different way. When I'm working on a specific brand with a solid voice (like Nike), I'll literally copy down the scripts for previous commercials to get a sense of writing for that tone of voice.

Do 100 ideas before showing any. You have to *relax into the process* of creativity, look around and see different kinds of connections. It forces you to let go of the destination and enjoy the process.

I used to do improv comedy and the thing there was “Don’t Think.” Just start talking and figure it out as you go. A lot of writers waste so much time self editing. Just bang it all out. Write a ton. Write one thing and move on. Do a lot. Then sort it out. Sometimes you just need that blast of fresh thinking and *quantity to start. Craft comes later.*

DON'T

—Adam Koppel

THINK.

Write write write. Like anything, you need reps early in your career. I used to have to write a gillion social post headlines to get a few through. But even the bad lines were good practice.

Get high, drink a little, get wasted on a diet of trashy soap operas or anything that sends you off in a different direction and then just churn. Leave it til the morning and revise. You may not be able to read your handwriting but you may spot a surprising, lateral nugget that is worth running with.

Write it til you love it.
Write it. Then rewrite.
Then read it out loud.
And rewrite it again.
Fast is not the answer.
The answer is the answer.
It's a totally subjective
field in many ways.
So only you can tell if
it's any good. And the
only way to tell if it's any
good is if you love it.

Write by hand, on a
rant, as furiously as you
can, before your self-
editing brain can catch
you. Things that belong
together will, miraculously,
stick together in the end.
That is a promise.

2

FEAR THE DEATH
OF DEMOCRACY,
NOT WRITING.

My top piece of advice is to not be afraid. *Be afraid of snakes, the death of democracy, and week-old chilli*, but don't be afraid of the blank page or the ideas you put forth.

My first ever CD told me “The amount of good ideas depends almost entirely on the amount of bad ideas you have. And it's cumulative”. This advice meant I stopped worrying about being correct when I literally didn't know how to do my job. And I just focused on being interested, interesting and prolific.

BAD IDEAS

Bad ideas are part of the process: a very important part, if you ask me.

The best advertising people are problem solvers by nature, and that's the reason bad ideas are so powerful. You can fix them. You can bend them. You can Frankenstein them. But not if you delete them.

Once you start to second guess yourself and make decisions based on fear or what you think other people might think is acceptable, you've lost whatever value you were bringing to the table.

Writing great copy isn't always about eloquence and perfection. *Sometimes the best way to stand out is to get it wrong.* Being wrong is a shortcut to creating something new, something more memorable. Got Milk? is a great example.

**BEING
BROWNG**

**ISART
SHORT
CUT**

**TO
SOME
THING
NEW.**

3

FEED THE BRAIN
AND IT WILL
FEED THE PEN.

Feed the brain and it will feed your pen. Simple maths, the more you put in, the more that comes out. The more diverse and frequent your reading, the more diverse and frequent your writing.

Sitting on the bus with your ears open is a great source of one liners and irresistible dialogue. Real life conversations unearth hidden truths. The top deck is akin to your own personal insights group and can be a catalyst to something you would never have dreamed of.

Don't sit down to write. Ideas, sentences or scripts come to you when your hands are busy with something else.

**WRITING
IS KIND OF
LIKE
INTENSE
CHARACTER
ACTING.**

—Chris Colliton

HAVE A
CONVERSATION
ABOUT
TOM CRUISE'S
TEETH.

—Joe Staples

If you're writing for a character or celebrity, do your research. Watch the movies, read the books, watch the shows. Take notes and start writing and thinking like them. *It's kind of like intense character acting.*

Read magazines about horse racing, listen to podcasts about breathing, have a conversation about Tom Cruise's teeth at the dentist, listen to Uber drivers stories about their side businesses, argue about Liverpool football club with a drunk guy in a pub. Maybe even read a book. If words are your happy place, explore them in all their guises. *Learn things you don't know why you are learning*, listen to people, argue, fight, explore, collaborate. Do it all.

LEARN
THINGS YOU
DON'T KNOW
WHY YOU ARE
LEARNING.

4

SAY IT STRAIGHT,
SAY IT GREAT.

Say it straight, say it great is still the best advice I've ever gotten. To this day, the first thing I do is write out, in big type at the top of my page, the worst, straightest headline I can think of. And then everything underneath that is an exercise in saying this in a way that evokes some sort of emotion.

**EVOKE
SOME SORT
OF EMOTION.**

RUSSET

DOWN

A HILL!

—Rick Chant

Take what you need to say in its most strategic, direct form then push it down a hill and see what it looks like after a few bumps and scratches. It may be more beautiful at the bottom of the hill than at the top.

Write copy that is relevant to the subject, the brand or the product and radical in the way it is delivered. There's no point being irrelevant and radical and equally, relevant and boring misses the target. Relevant and radical is the sweet spot worth swinging for.

BE

RELEVANT

RADICAL.

—Rick Chant

AND

5

WRITE IT LIKE
YOU SAY IT.

Everyone thinks that great writers need to be kings and queens of grammar. When actually *it's about writing how we speak*. Short. Broken sentences. Imperfect. Yet conversational.

Write in your own voice. And don't be afraid to embrace the way you actually speak/talk. When people hire you or put you on a brief, they're looking for that special thing you bring to the table. And that's your voice.

SHORT.

BROKEN

SENTENCES.

IMPERFECT

YET

CONVERSATIONAL.

—Josh Braithwaite

Be clear on what it is
you're trying to say and
just say it.

*Don't worry about ad
school.* People who went
will talk about it alot.
But I don't think you
need it. If you took a
different path, and didn't
"learn" advertising in
school, you're actually
free from that very classic
ad TOV (which is the
reason why most ads
sound the same). Believe
in your unique approach
to words – that will make
your work stand out vs
being just another ad.

**DON'T
WORRY
ABOUT
AD
SCHOOL.**

6

LESS WRDS PLZ.

Be a ruthless editor of your work. Look at what you've written and say, how do I simplify this until *every word has a reason to be there.*

Fall out of love with your own words. Write the long version. Walk away and revisit it later with a pair of scissors. Editing your own words is difficult but most readers will thank you in the end.

**SORRY
FOR THE
LONG
LETTER.**

I DIDN'T
HAVE TIME
TO MAKE
IT SHORTER.

—Mark Twain

Everyone thinks great writers are beautifully poetic and verbose. When actually *it's about being as simple and clear as you can be.*

Don't use florid language as a crutch. Instead of rushing to the craft and language part of writing scripts, spend more time on the ideas.

**DON'T USE
FLORID
LANGUAGE
AS A
CRUTCH.**

—Gregg Clampffer

7

CLOSING
THOUGHTS.

Nobody likes ads. Don't write an ad. *Write anything but an ad.* Write a joke or a poem or a story. Think of the media differently. Billboards are one liner jokes. TV spots are stories. Radio spots are phone messages someone leaves you. Just stop thinking you are writing an ad.

**NOBODY
LIKES ADS.**

We control so very little in this field. And yet, we so often stake our happiness and self worth on the thing we control the least - the output. Maybe it turns out better than you dreamed. Maybe it was great once and 1000 people ruined it. But either way, the final output is truly out of your control. What is in your control is the day to day of it. Getting in a room with smart, stupid, silly, sensitive, strange people and giggling while you try to solve whatever hard problem is the center

of your universe today. Enjoy that process. Be grateful for the privilege of that process. *Find joy and creative fulfillment in the writing and rewriting and big sky thinking and polishing of small imperfect pebbles that no one will ever see or appreciate.*

The brief had just changed and I was scrambling to re-fit an old piece of work through the new goal posts. Dan Wieden turned to me and said. “Tim, let it go. *Creativity’s like shit. There’s always going to be more coming tomorrow.*” This always helps when we hit a snag or a client comment blows work up. We don’t have to build back with the same pieces. Sometimes, you just gotta make room for new, better shit.

“Work hard, and don’t give up. The writing crap can be learned—the hard work cannot.” That really stuck with me because, especially as a writer, you feel like either “you have it or you don’t.” This was a perspective I really needed to hear.

CREATIVITY'S
LIKE SHIT.
THERE'S
ALWAYS
GOING
TO BE MORE
COMING
TOMORROW.

In summary, fear snakes, not writing. And just fucking write. Write it straight. Then write it great. Write like you'd say it. Then say that in as few words possible. And don't forget: creativity's like shit. There will always be more tomorrow. So get drunk and start a conversation about Tom Cruise's teeth.

Xo Taylor Black

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