

The secret of good writing

 By [James Hurford](#)

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Most people think good writing flows easily and effortlessly on first draft. Nothing could be further from the truth. Harry Shaw said: "There is no such thing as good writing. There is only good rewriting."

More than just proofreading, good editing improves the clarity and forcefulness of your writing. It's where the real work of writing happens.

Here're some tips to help you improve your editing:

1. **Read out it loud** - if it doesn't sound right, it usually isn't right.
2. **Sleep on it** - if it's an important document wait at least a night before you edit.
3. **Don't add, cut** - concise writing is more powerful and easier to read.
4. **Be harsh** - if a word or phrase doesn't add value to what you're saying, get rid of it.
5. **Use plain, simple English** - inexperienced writers use pretentious words and jargon, it excludes readers.
6. **Say it clearly first time** - don't waffle. Throw out all unnecessary redundancies you don't need.
7. **Kill unsightly adverbs** - they usually serve only to pad out a statement that doesn't need padding:
 - With padding - He ran quickly
 - Without padding - He ran
8. **Avoid passive sentences** - it makes for weak, unconvincing writing:
 - Passive - Mistakes were made
 - Active - I made a mistake
9. **Make it easy to read** - write for the eye as well as the mind. Number major points, use white space and keep paragraphs short.
10. **Rewrite** - good editing, like good writing is an art. It takes time and practice to develop a real talent for editing, but the end result is worth it - your writing will be more alive, more effective, and ultimately more likely to be read.

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