

HOW TO STOP STRUGGLING WITH ENGLISH WRITING



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PURPOSE OF THIS E-BOOK

Do you know which the two key pillars are when studying English (and any language in general)? Good guess, **speaking and writing**. And today is your lucky day as you have come across this free e-book that will reveal all the secrets and tips for a successful English writing.

The main goal of this e-book is to give you a clear view and procedure to improve you English writing skills. It is divided in five sections that will show you some very handy techniques and tips that you can put into practice to start writing properly in English once for all!

We really hope that you find useful the contents of this e-book and like going through it. It was a pleasure for us to write it!



PART 1: HOW TO STOP STRUGGLING WITH ENGLISH WRITING

“I just can’t put it down on paper; I’m no good at writing. I didn’t do well at it at school and besides – my grammar is terrible, too!”

Are you familiar with the sentiment expressed in the above sentence? If you are – keep reading because you’ll find out the biggest secret about easy English writing! If you’re struggling at English writing and more than a couple of sentences give you headaches, it doesn’t mean you’re a hopeless writer. It’s just that no-one has told you yet what the easy way to English writing is, and believe me – it’s simpler than you may think!

But first let’s look at why so many foreigners are bad at writing in English, especially when it comes to writing a bit lengthier piece of text.

To understand what happens behind the scenes, you have to look back at your school days. Try to remember moments when you had to write an essay – even if it happened during your native language studies. Didn’t you get comments from your teacher such as: “You can’t write it this way, you need to use better language”?



And how many times did you have to write about topics you found very boring?

If you analyze your school years, you’ll realize that you’ve been lead to believe that writing is something special. You’ve been under impression ever since that to write well you need to use very formal and literal language otherwise you just won’t be able to produce anything better than a piece of gibberish.

When you started to learn English you probably took on board the same attitude towards writing. I’m not saying it definitely applies in your situation, but still there’s a big likelihood that your assertion of poor English writing skills is based on nothing more than shifting sand.

It’s something you believe to be true because you can’t write like Shakespeare or Hemingway. In real-life however, normal people aren’t required to produce pieces of literature gems,

all you need to do is explain your point clearly on a piece of paper or a computer screen!

And here’s what it all boils down to – **to stop struggling with English writing you need to change your mindset first! You have to stop perceiving writing as art or as something that is going to be scrutinized by your teacher.** For normal daily situations our English writing needs to be to the point and has to clearly describe the essence of the topic, that’s it.

Also bear in mind that unless you’re writing a novel in English using rich and sophisticated language, you have to avoid using long, difficult words. Don’t fall for the misassumption that native English speakers would think that your English writing skills are poor if you use simple, most commonly used words and phrases to explain your point.

I remember a few years ago when I worked in an international team, I used to notice the way native English speakers and foreigners would write their e-mails. I think that if I were to show you some sample e-mails, you’d often say that the e-mail written by our native English speaking manager has been written by a foreigner, and vice versa!

This just goes to show how simply and casually native English speakers write, and that there's absolutely nothing wrong with it! And please don't get me wrong - I'm not saying you have to neglect grammar and ignore word order in sentences or not use punctuation marks. The point that I'm trying to make here is that you don't have to make your piece of writing sound like a poem!

Whether you write an e-mail to your English speaking friend on Facebook, or a report for your divisional manager, you have to take it for what it is, don't be fooled into thinking that you have to write plenty of meaningless sentences just to fill the space and make the text look bigger.

Instead just imagine that you speak to that person. What would you say to them? What is the main topic or the main issue you want to tell that person about? You simply have to put it all down on paper or computer screen – and forget about boring essays you used to write at school just because you had to!

PART 2: SECRET OF SUCCESSFUL ENGLISH WRITING – WRITE AS YOU SPEAK!

In the previous section about successful English writing I was trying to dispel the myth that writing skill is something special, something that only those talented enough are blessed with.

In reality there's nothing so special about putting your thoughts down on a piece of paper. Humans have done it for hundreds of years and writing has always gone hand in hand with the spoken language.

Many foreign English speakers, however, are often struggling to write a couple sentences and keep staring at a blank screen for five minutes before deciding on what to write next.

Well, it's not a big issue if most writing you have to do is work-related. Sending e-mails describing various issues and communicating with your colleagues and superiors is pretty straightforward and you don't have to be creative to pull it off.

When it comes to writing something more specific – like doing tests at college and answering questions, things can get on top of you and you can suddenly start feeling as if you're required to write in a certain way, but you just can't delivered that writing style!



The key to successful English writing is as simple as it might sound a bit confusing to some – you have to speak first, and then write!

Personally I don't think anyone should be surprised that spoken English comes first, and only then comes the written word. Before you put a pen to paper or hit a key on a keyboard you actually have the very thought forming in your mind. Even though you might think that successful writers bypass the thinking process and produce written material directly from their mind, it's not entirely through.

In fact, it takes about 600 milliseconds for your thoughts to be verbalized by your mouth, so I can't see how writing would be any faster than speech. And I don't mean the actual speed of writing here, I mean the speed between your brain activity and your fingers.

So once you realize that to write successfully in English you need to have a clearly formed thought in your head, it's not a surprise anymore that so far you haven't been able to write good enough. When we think, we don't have clearly formulated sentences floating in our minds. All we have is abstract concepts, flash-like notions and work-chunks. There's not much to write if want to duplicate your mind's content on paper!

You need to create meaningful English content even before you start writing something, and that simply means to speak first, and then put it down on paper. It may sound childish at first, but I don't think you should concern yourself with how it may sound. Your aim is being effective and if you can achieve 100% improvement of your English writing skills, should you really care about how it's achieved?

And here's another factor why we, foreign English speakers, find it a bit more difficult to write in English. When we think, there's much of our own language's content in our minds. Speaking the words out helps us to create meaningful English sentences, simple as that!

When I write articles for my blog, I always speak during the process to help myself write the actual sentences. I'd come back later to correct mistakes, change words and proofread the article; in the first draft I don't care so much about the article's technical quality.

As you may have noticed, spoken English is different from written English. Normally you don't have clearly defined sentence endings, and the whole speech sometimes forms a continuous flow of words and phrases with sudden interruptions when a person is thinking of what to say, and so on.

So when you create a piece of written English material, your task number one is to verbalize your thoughts into a sentence, and number two – put it down on a paper or a word processing software on a computer. At this stage you don't have to pay too much attention to its grammar structure and correct word placement. **Also don't get stuck when you can't think of a particular word when writing. Use other words to describe the same concept – just like you'd do when speaking.**

Next time when you're writing a test at college or a letter to your child's teacher or some organization, try to speak as you're writing to help you construct English sentences.

Try to forget about writing being a different animal than spoken language. Any human being learns to speak first and only then write, and while it might be the other way around for us, foreign English speakers, speaking while you write is still going to help you to be more efficient.

You don't need to speak very loud; all you actually need to do is speak quietly at yourself so that you can focus your mind! You probably wouldn't believe that such a simple technique would result in a radical English writing improvement; nonetheless, it works very well for those who've always perceived writing to be something special.

The reality is that you have to perceive English writing as a tangible form of spoken language and all of a sudden it will become much easier to produce a nice, easy-to-read piece of English text!

PART 3: PLANNING AS A CORNERSTONE OF SUCCESSFUL ENGLISH WRITING

If you want to be able to express yourself properly and just as easily on paper as when speaking, you have to write as you speak. That is my mantra and we looked at it in the very detail in the last section. And it's indeed something I go by every time I write a blog post for my website, or a lengthy e-mail or just about any other piece of writing that would normally require some effort and time to compose.

Speaking to yourself and putting it down on paper isn't enough, though, if you want to be able to compose fast and efficient letters, reports or do some creative writing. Once you open your mouth and start articulating your thoughts it does indeed become much easier to get your creative juices flowing. Still, you may find yourself in a limbo of dead ends when your thoughts seem to be constantly shifting and you can't maintain a consistent writing style.

Let's say, for example, that you're going to write a diary entry depicting today's events and how you were affected by them emotionally. So you start speaking as if telling a friend about what happened to you and why a particular event has affected you emotionally. For some reason writing is still slow, though. You write a paragraph but you're struggling to start a new one because even your speech process seems to have ground to

a halt on its own! It's even worse than the typical writer's block, isn't it?

This is when planning comes into action, and believe me – it does wonders to your writing speed and clarity of thoughts!

What I'm talking about is basically a short, about five bullet-point long list of things you want to tell about in your piece of writing. You may have a very clear general idea about what you have to say, but when it comes to the actual writing, having a more detailed action plan is crucial in order to produce a logical and well-structured story. You will also avoid jumping from subject to subject and returning to

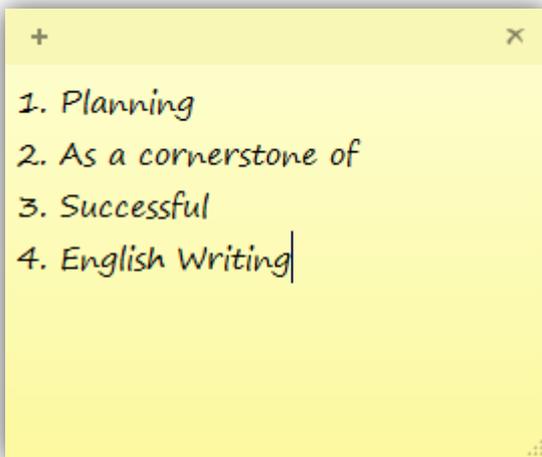
things you've already discussed if you have a nice blueprint of all the main points in a logical sequence!

Planning also helps you to add substance to your story. Not having enough to say was probably one of the reasons you dreaded writing essays and reports at school, am I not right in saying that? You can write all you have to say on half a page and your flow of thoughts is exhausted!

I know that feeling very well because I kept struggling with writing articles for my website. It would take me literally days to complete an article that touched the subject from all perspectives and gave a full and deep analysis of the issue. Now I can finish a four page article in a couple hours time and it's all thanks to 5 minute preparation before embarking on the actual writing!

Of course, **not all types of writing need to be long and comprehensive. Sometimes your goal might be quite the opposite – to put all information into a short and concise piece of text.** A typical example of such writing would be an e-mail including instructions for a project partner. You don't need to write it as long as an essay as it would only inhibit the recipient's perception and your instructions might become dubious.

Still, a clear idea of what exactly you want to say in your e-mail in a form of a short list is going to make a big difference in your writing time and clearness of thoughts while you write.



Personally I find it best to jot the plan on a piece of paper. Even when I type in a text processing software, I have a short list written in a notepad next to the laptop. I believe that if you just keep the list in your mind, those thoughts have a tendency to be elusive and you may easily forget what the third and fourth things you wanted to write about were.

Let's have a look at a bullet-list I drew up before I started to write this section:

- Reminder of the previous article;
- Speaking as you write is not enough!
- Planning as a crucial element of the writing process;
- Planning helps adding substance;
- Write the list on a piece of paper instead of keeping in mind;
- Planning example;
- Planning also helps the reader.

It took me less than five minutes to come up with this short list yet it easily saves about an hour – if not even more! – in writing time. Had I started writing this very article with only the main idea in mind - “planning the writing process” – I would be struggling with conveying the message as fluently and easily as I do now. Moreover, by failing to do so, I'd be actually conflicting with the very topic I'm writing about!

Bear in mind as well that **planning adds not only substance to what you write, it also helps structuring the text which aids the perception of the reader**. You can't forget that on most occasions you don't write only for yourself. There's almost always a person who the written message is created for so you have to keep in mind that you have to make your writing a pleasant and easy reading as well!

So the bottom line is the following. **Before you write something, plan what exactly you're going to write**. Write a short list of the main points in a logical sequence so that they sketch a blueprint for your story. It's going to make your writing process so much easier and also the person reading it is going to get the message clearly instead of reading it three times before understanding what you actually meant to say!

PART 4: WANT TO WRITE IN ENGLISH FAST? WRITE A DRAFT FIRST!

You're about to write a short essay in English. You're adhering to all advice given in the previous sections about successful English writing on this e-book. You're not pretending to be some native English speaking writer and you don't set unreasonable expectations upon your writing style. When you start writing, you imagine you're talking to someone so that it's easier to form sentences and produce a coherent piece of writing. You've even done some planning and you're sitting in front of a laptop with a five bullet-point list in front of you.

Yet it still wouldn't come to you, and the writing process is painfully slow! "What on earth is happening to me?" – You're thinking and it makes you more conscious of the fact that you can't write fast enough. The so called writer's block is taking place again, and you just can't seem to understand what's going on!

So let's analyze your inability to produce a piece of written English text despite all the planning you've done and all your attempts to imagine you're speaking about the topic with someone.

You've created a short list, about 5 bullet-points long, of things you want to write about, correct? And you're trying to force yourself to think of a perfect way you'd tell the whole story to someone but the inspiration just wouldn't come? Or should I put emphasis on the words "a perfect way"? Isn't striving for perfection letting you down by making you re-think every single word you're about to write?

I hope the answer is obvious – to write a piece of English text you also need to do it fast, and without much consideration of correctness and style! While being a perfectionist generally isn't a bad thing, there are times when you have to suppress the desire within you to be perfect. Especially – when it comes to speaking English because speech is supposed to be spontaneous and too much planning can kill your English fluency. Since the technique I'm suggesting you to follow when writing in English involves speaking about the topic with yourself and transferring it onto the paper or type on a computer, it's essential you do it spontaneously, swiftly and without a second thought of the quality and correctness of what you just wrote!

In other words, **you need to write a quick draft which is going to form the main body of your letter, memo, e-mail or essay.** Don't take me wrong though, writing draft doesn't automatically mean twice as much time spent in the process than if you were to write it all spotlessly from scratch. Why?

First of all, don't forget how much time you just wasted just sitting and staring at the monitor unable to produce any text whatsoever! Therefore it shouldn't come as a surprise that any result is better than no result.

Even if you do spend additional time correcting your own mistakes after the draft has been written, you should see merit of this technique in that it allows you to write a concrete piece of text. Regardless of its quality, it's a tangible result and it can be improved upon. On the other hand, if you keep hoping that inspiration will befall upon you and make you produce a brilliant piece of writing with no mistakes at all, in most likelihood you'll get no result.

Secondly, correcting a piece of text that's been spewed out without much thinking is much easier and quicker than you may think! I've always found that my mind works best when it's not limited by conscious considerations regarding English grammar and style. We all definitely know more than we can say, and if you don't put additional strain on yourself by constantly thinking – "OK, how do I write this sentence, this way or that way? Hold on, it doesn't sound right... OK, let me think, the best way of putting it would be... No, no, that's not right either..." – you'll produce an OK text which can be touched up in 5 minutes to become a brilliant piece of text! Remember – it's less time consuming to fix those five spots in five paragraphs that don't sound right than spending five minutes on each of them trying to make it all perfect from the beginning!

Believe it or not, right now I'm writing this article the very same way as I suggested you to do! I have a five point plan in front of me to go by, and I'm just speaking in my mind and transferring my thoughts into the word processing software! I don't care about how it sounds, and I know for sure that there will be places I'll have to correct. Time lost on correction, however, is going to be insignificant compared to time saved in the fast writing process.

What's surprising about writing drafts is that sometimes you'll find there's very little to correct when you go back to finalize the piece of English text. Personally I do quite a lot of writing in English and I have days when it's harder to gather thoughts and speak, so the writing process is also slightly hindered. When I proofread an article, however, I often find it sounds very well and there's nothing to add or take away! So it may happen to you if you let creativity take over and just write fast and without much thinking!

As for correcting the draft – here's a handy tip. Read the piece of text aloud. Don't just scan it as mistakes will escape your attention! You have to read it aloud and surprisingly enough you'll spot most of awkwardly sounding bits that you didn't notice when writing the draft! It may seem slightly strange at first, but if you analyze it a bit, it all makes sense.

When you write the draft fast and without much thinking, you are the creator of the content. Yet when you go back and check what's written you're not involved anymore in the process of creation! You adopt an observer's role and now you can spot any grammar or style mistake much easier than during the process of writing.

As we know it's much easier to recognize something than to create. To put it in context of English – we can all tell a foreign English speaker apart from a native, yet when we have to speak we're not as good as we'd like to be. We kind of know what we want to say but our active vocabulary is nearly always smaller than our passive vocabulary which is the words, phrases and expressions we can recognize when spoken by others.

So when you go back and check your own draft, you're engaging this ability to recognize bad speech patterns and all you have to do is put the badly sounding bits in other words so that they sound better!

So here are the **three steps of the draft writing technique**:

- Just get it all out on a piece of paper or text processing software;
- Proofread and correct the text you just produced;
- Use spellchecker to ensure you haven't missed any grammar mistakes.

And of course, don't forget making up the bullet-point list and speaking with yourself as you write!

This short plan may seem common sense at first; however, people often don't realize importance of the spontaneous and fast writing style. Just getting it all out and writing something no matter how bad it may look at first is crucial in a successful English writing process!

PART 5: IF YOU WANT TO WRITE FAST – KEEP DISTRACTIONS AT BAY!

Until now we've covered the essentials of a good English writing plan:

Tip #1 – Create a short 5 – 7 bullet point list for your piece of writing. Don't mind those 10 – 15 minutes you're going to spend writing the plan. It's time well spent considering hours of time you're going to save down the line!

Tip #2 – Imagine you're talking to a friend of yours as you write and all you put down on paper or type on the screen is just your conversation. In other words – make a habit of speaking in your mind as you write and you'll discover it's much, much easier to write this way!

Tip #3 – Use simple language because if you try to think of the best fitting words, you'll spend so much extra time that you'll sooner reach the writer's block than finish your piece! Remember – it's much easier to implement corrections after your draft has been written!

Tip #4 – Don't sit down at your desk expecting to finish your essay, letter or report in one go. Write a quick draft first, and then fix it. If you follow this technique, you'll realize it's much easier to fix something that's already there than write a flawless piece of writing right from scratch.

If you follow these steps, you're almost guaranteed to write your letters, reports, essays, blog posts and articles in a record short time!

Why did I say almost?

Well, **there's one more thing you have to bear in mind. Namely – distractions.** Even if you adhere to all tips I've mentioned so far, you still risk being sidetracked from writing if you keep checking e-mail every five minutes, check words in online English dictionary and realize that you've actually spent 10 minutes browsing the dictionary website because you spotted something interesting...

In other words – **you should definitely make sure you focus exclusively on writing when you write.** Close down all unnecessary applications on your PC or laptop when you're writing, and simply say to yourself – "I'm going to write for 30 minutes straight and I won't do anything else during that time".

Well, it can be 30 or 40 or 60 minutes – it's up to you what timeframe you chose, but having one is definitely beneficial as it's been proven to help focus on task at hand. If you're a busy person, you can check your e-mail when those 30 minutes are up, and after a short break get back to work.

You may even consider turning music off and work in a complete silence – personally I find such conditions best for creative activities!

Just make sure you don't start making excuses and start giving in small, seemingly innocent temptations during your writing sessions. You may have a sudden urge to make a cup of coffee. Or you may discover that you're very hungry and you need to make a sandwich – it will definitely help the creative juices flow, won't it?

In no time you'll find yourself back into the old situation of sitting in front of your PC, staring at a blank screen or a couple lines and wondering why it's so damn hard to write stuff in English!

So keep yourself very organized and keep ALL potential distractions away while you write. Provide the best writing conditions you can, and you'll see it pay back tenfold. **Writing 800 words in 40 minutes won't seem like a mission impossible**, and even though you shouldn't be necessarily aiming for certain amount of words, you'll see big improvement to your English writing skills by being fully engaged in the writing process!

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David collaborates on [Learn English Online](#). [Learn English Online](#) is a website where you'll find hundreds of online resources to learn English for free. These resources will help you improving all your English skills like listening, writing, speaking, vocabulary or grammar. There are also [learning guides](#) to help you make the most of these resources.

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