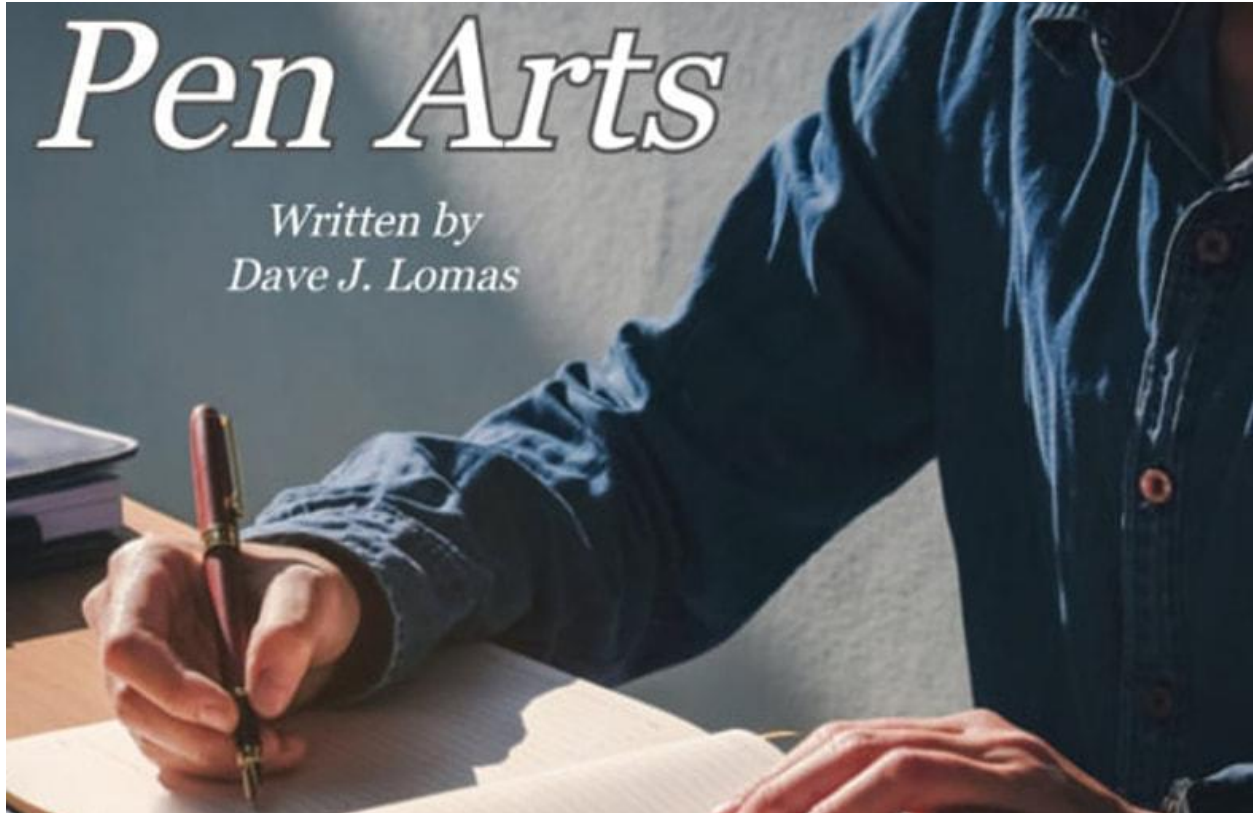


Pen Arts

(Special Project Article)



Are you interested in creative or formal writing? If so then read on. First published in July of 2014 Pen Arts is an easy to follow selection of tips and tricks for those thinking of writing articles for the first time, and maybe even having them published one day. Well you never know until you try?

Are you a writer? If you say no then take a bit of time to think about it as chances are you are more of a writer than you think.

From a martial artist to a writer of various martial arts and social topics many people think that I had some form of formal training but that was never the case. All I did was practice my writing skills over and over again and learned as I went along.

It is true to say that many people will never be able to write to a noticeable degree but that does not mean that they will never be able to write anything of worth, in fact, it is often the case that they may have written a best-seller in the past but the format failed them. In many cases the content may be very good, for example, but how it is presented may be the main reason why so many people fail in their efforts.

If you count the number of written words that you may do, or others may do, over a period of just one week on a social networking site, or within an on-line forum, it would truly shock you to find just how much written work you and others may have done in that period of time.

At this point it would be fair to say that your written work on such social networking sites are maybe not what you would call 'word-perfect' but with a few pointers on spelling, layout and how to make it look good to the eye, and in addition, also readable in an easy and understandable way then you too can also become recognised as a writer far faster than you think.

Any form of writing is creative and anything that is creative therefore is a form of art. In the same way that a painting is created to form an image then so it is the same thing when it comes to writing with regard to creating an image in the reader's mind.

In addition to creating an image in the reader's mind a well written story, or maybe even a documentary style form of writing, can also create and project an atmospheric feel to things in just the same way as any picture or film can do within the reader's mind as they formulate both consciously and subconsciously events unfolding before them through such written words.

Some writers will also take this creative writing, through good content, even further by making the printed words themselves look good to the eyes.

Long before the invention of a typewriter, or a modern day Laptop, many people would write in an artistic way by using very fanciful shapes to form the words themselves. This artistic way of writing the words are clearly shown throughout history and even to this very day.

This form of word shaping, such as calligraphy, is even used a great deal on modern day computers in the form of preset 'fonts' of course. Even a person's signature at the end of a letter, as a perfect example, is more than just a way of showing individuality and uniqueness but also a form of visual decorative word art.

Due to my long held belief that anyone can become a writer, or a better writer than you are now, here are a few tips and tricks to help you get started.

The first problem that many people will have is how to get started or what to write about. Both of these initial problems are very much connected to each other when you think about it. So with direct regard to that initial problem my saying - If You Think It Write It! - is a good starting point when it comes to writing something.

If you think of something that you have a lot to say about then write it down. Forget about the spelling or how it should be read, simply write it down as fast as you can, and keep writing until you are not sure what to say next or finding yourself too tired to carry on.

From this initial start also avoid at all costs the thought of trying to write on a subject that you think needs to be the size of a book but just simply let the topic develop in small bite size bits and then link each of these bite size bits together at a later stage. Also avoid looking at how others write. Develop your own unique writing style. Don't copy other people's writing methods. Your style of writing will develop all by itself in time.

There are no hard and fast rules when it comes to writing but there are a few basic guidelines to follow that cannot be avoided however.

Making your work unique is vital if you do not wish the reader to think you are simply copying from other people's work. What would be the point anyway if you simply copied written stuff from someone else? So that being the case only write what is in your head.

Let what you say flow from your mind and not from any reference books.

At this point I do need to highlight a pet hate of mine that many writers tend to do, that being the use of the term 'one must'. One must do this, one must do that. I truly totally hate it when I see that written. Maybe it is just me on that subject but I do think of it as a command rather than a suggestion and that of course some people will find offensive I would imagine to a degree?

It also reminds me of a posh person saying to their servants "One must always do what I say at all times" in a high and mighty condescending voice.

Writing a load of words is often the easy part but checking afterwards to see if it is correctly done is truly the hard part and can often be very time consuming. Just one page of written work will not only need to be checked in various ways but also many, many times over to ensure it is fully correct. Most will first check for spelling mistakes but reading it correctly is the first step in this process.

Having written a bite size amount of work, or maybe, a page of text the best thing to do at that point is to walk away for at least an hour then go back to it and read it out loud as if you had never read or seen it before. As you read it out loud to yourself, as if you were reading someone else's work, ask yourself, does it read as if the person were saying it to you in a verbal way or is it just jumbled up in parts and failing to flow?

If you find yourself having to stop to understand what you have written in parts or you find that it is not the same as if you would say such things verbally then you need to go back and edit those messed up parts again, or even, redo the entire section.

Remember that what you are writing should be more or less the same as if you would say it to someone in person. That is why I find saying or writing the term 'one must' is so patronising. Would you say such a thing to someone in person? For sure not many people would speak in such a way in the street. Or to put it another way most people would say 'you must' rather than say 'one must'.

Remember the golden rule at this point and that is words do not bleed. If a section is reading, or just simply looking wrong, or you find a needless repetition of some words then cut them out and find a better way of doing it. In addition to doing things this way first you may also stumble upon some misspelt words before you take on the task of doing a full on spelling check at a later stage.

Is your written work ready to publish? If you are writing an article for a local newspaper for example then the odd little spelling mistake will not be worth worrying over as it will be read and thrown away the same day, chances are, but in the case of some written work that will be seen by many people over many years to come, like an on-line publication or a book for for example, then taking the time to perfect what you have done is well worth the effort in the end.

Writing can be a work of art in just the same way as a painting, therefore, if you think it will be seen by many people in years to come then treat what you have done as a work of art in the same way and perfect it before showing it to the world.

Before publishing your work you will need to give it a title and also, in most cases, a sub-header as unlike a general comment or a passing thought if your written work is aimed at being informative, educational or instructional in any way then it will need a title so that people will know that it is a formal publication, and by the nature of the title, it will also help to show what the content is all about to the reader.

In the case of a sub-header, that should be a very short description of what the article is all about to enhance the main title's aim of highlighting the subject that you have written about. For example this article is called Pen Arts so from seeing that title the reader will know it is something to do with writing or being creative, therefore the main title of this article shows it to be about writing and shows it to be both educational and informative about learning to write.

It is often also a good idea to end your article with some form of foot note so as to avoid leaving the subject you are writing about floating in the air. A simple comment to end on is often a good way to end any written work.

Having completed the initial check to see that what you have done reads in a good and natural flowing way the next step is then to spell check each and every single word over and over again.

You would think that this would be a very easy thing to do in this day and age with the availability of automatic spell checking software on your Laptop or PC but think again.

A spellchecker can only check for words that are written wrong but they cannot help you if you have typed a word correctly but it is the wrong word for the job in hand. For example the word assess is correctly spelt and relates to the word 'assessment' but then again so is the word asses. Meaning of course only one 'S' at the end of the word but still spelt correctly.

That being the case the spellchecker will regard both words as fine and therefore not highlight the fact that asses, meaning a person's bottom, is not really the ideal word to use when writing to someone regarding that they need to assess you, or someone else, in some way.

It is for this reason that a simple spell check is nowhere near enough when you take into account that you could have typed a word correctly but the meaning of the word is not the correct one for the job in hand.

This process of looking for spelling mistakes, or the use of the wrong words, is called proof-reading and it is vital when it comes to rectifying words within sentences that do not fully read as well as they could.

By this stage you should have now written what you wanted to write and have gone through all your work in fine detail many times. It reads well, you think to yourself, and as far as you can tell it is spelt correctly with the correct wording needed for the job but before publishing your work take a bit of time to think about what else you need to add before taking that final step of publishing it.

For some learning to be a writer is all about going on training courses or paying someone to teach them but do you really need to do all that is the real question?

Learning the ropes as they say is of course a valid way of doing things and picking up a few tips and tricks along the way can and does help to develop your writing skills but the fact remains that practice over a long period of time is the only true way. Writing is an art form and with any art form practice is the key word.

Being told how to write is something that can, and often does, prevent a person from developing their own unique writing skills, so therefore rather than have someone to teach you, or waste money on some form of training course, why not just simply practice and study your own work until you feel happy with the end results?

Sadly even if you do take up a form of training, if you have no true natural flair at writing then no amount of advice or instruction will get you to the level that you desire and progress will not be noticeable. However even if you have no true natural flair at writing, all is not lost.

Again it all comes down to practice and making sure it all reads well. It may take a long time to perfect your writing skills but often that is the best way to develop your own unique individual style.

To find your true unique writing skills try writing about different things and different subjects. Try your hand at writing poetry, for example, and also items like official reports, documents, stories or news reports and so on. Writing about your hobbies and interests is also a good way of doing things as writing about something of true interest to you will be a good motivational thing when it comes to writing larger articles.

If you have a passion to write then don't give up just because you think you will never get there. Keep writing and store your work. Go back from time to time to the things you have written about in the past and look again at how you can perfect what you have done. Remember that something you have written about in the past did not have the experience behind it like you have now compared to your earlier work.

If you feel happy at writing then that is all that truly matters in the end and not what others think of your work. Never think of what you do as a job, just simply think of it as an outlet for your creative side and enjoy the moment.

A common problem that many people will face from time to time, even seasoned professional writers, is the subject of 'writer's block' as it is often called. Writer's block is nothing to worry about. It simply means that you have nothing in your mind to write down at that point in time or you are simply not in the correct frame of mind to do so for whatever reason.

Many other factors can also be the reason why you have writer's block. Being ill or having other things on your mind can and often does prevent someone from writing at times and although it could be months before you feel like writing again, it is not worth worrying about. It is just one of those things.

If you lack confidence in showing or publishing your written work, or worry about what people will think, then take comfort from the fact that all writers have had to face that problem in the past.

Show friends and family your work and see what they say about your efforts, or better still, just simply publish your work and see what others, who do not know you, say about it for a more honest and unbiased response. Being shy about your written work is simply just something that you will have to overcome sooner or later and of course sooner is the best way.

When it comes to writing, regardless of the nature or content of the work involved, some people will have specific words that they do not like and will avoid them if they can. In many, if not all, situations they are somewhat scared to use a range of words that they could use but due to not being fully sure how to spell the words in question, in the correct way, they avoid them and as a result they will use an alternative word, or words, to get the job done rather than waste time checking.

Sometimes they will avoid some specific words, or terms, in an effort to simplify what they are trying to say rather than use a more complex term that people may not understand but it can also be the case that they themselves are simply unsure if the word is the correct one to use or if the meaning of the word is the right one for the job in hand. In any event using words that you like, or are more comfortable with, is fine so long as the job gets done and it all makes sense in the end.

In fact in those early days of writing this is how your own unique writing style develops to a degree and there is nothing wrong in doing it that way.

However if you still find yourself being scared of using some words over a prolonged period of time then maybe doing a bit of research on those words and making a note of them would be a good thing to do. Of course over a period of time with practice, as you write more and more, some words will become less scary to use as you find yourself more aware of their meaning and how to spell them correctly without the need to waste time checking to see if you have done it right. In the end it all comes down to practice and checking your work often.

When it comes to writing there is always something new to learn that can help things look and read better. Avoid using big, not needed, complicated words for example.

Keeping the wording simple and direct will help the reader to understand what you are saying far better than a string of fancy words that they simply cannot understand.

Avoid cutting words or sentences short. The shortened words 'I've' may be understood by many but saying or writing 'I have' will not only ensure that the reader understands better what you mean but it will also show that you have not been idle minded when writing your article.

Using terms like 'MMA' for example is not something everyone will understand, and in addition it could mean anything, so writing the full title of 'Mixed Martial Arts' as in this case will also ensure a better understanding of what you mean. Also avoid swear words as that is simply not going to get your work published. Although there are some exceptions to that rule of course subject to the nature of the topic in question.

There is just one more vital thing to do before you publish your bite size, short or feature size article and that is to add a photo illustration of some kind to show further what you are writing about.

Not only will it capture the reader's eye first, and maybe make them more interested in what you are writing about, but it will also add a sense of professionalism to your work in just the same way a poster in a shop window is more noticeable by its illustration or a book cover photo.

A regular problem that writers tend to come up against, without even realising it most of the time is when people fail to understand the written work they have done.

If the reader fails to understand the written content then they will not always make a comment, or reply further, on the subject in question as a result. This problem is not really fully down to you the writer but more a case of failing to target your readers in a more specific way.

If you are writing on a medical issue, for example, then of course if people are reading such a topic in a medical journal, or some other form of publication that covers such a subject, then clearly using all the various medical and technical terms associated with such a subject will be understood by those reading it. However if the so-called man in the street was to read such an article without any prior understanding, or training in such things, then even though you the writer are fully correct with regard to the contents and terms, they will at least in part, find it difficult to read and understand such things when it comes to the more complex and technical terms used on such a subject.

Therefore when writing on any subject, always aim to keep what you write about simple and easy to understand and if at all possible try to target those readers who are interested and understanding of such things.

You may know what you are writing about and may be very accurate with regard to the content but not everyone may be clever enough to read and understand the more advanced aspects of the subject in question in front of them.

So the next time you publish your written work and no one gives you feedback, or makes any comments at all, ask yourself the question 'Did they understand what I have written or was it somewhat beyond their understanding, and, should I make it more simplified next time'?

So you have a story to tell and you think it would be a very good idea to write a book about it - wrong! Do that and you will fail!

Many people over the years have thought of writing a book on many and various things but they, in most cases, fail to realise that the work involved is a full time commitment and a job of great discipline when it comes to staying with it each and every day.

Writing a book is one of the biggest projects anyone can ever undertake when it comes to written work and the problems that come with it are many and very frustrating at times when it comes to collating all that information into a readable format.

The person thinking of writing such a thing may have many thoughts and ideas in their head that they want to put down in written form but do they have enough to write about to fill a book is the first thing they must ask themselves. Depending on the size of the book that they are hoping to do, chances are the book writer is looking at around 70 to 100 thousand words. Yes - thousands of words, or the book would be far too small to be classified as one, but would instead only be large enough to be a small paperback type of publication.

There are no rules set in stone as to how big a book should be in size, and written content, but if the author is hoping to make a lot of money from his or her work then a small publication that can be read in just a day may only warrant a very small selling price.

To put it in more simple terms ask yourself the question - would you pay more than just £3, for example, on something that is nothing more than a small newspaper or magazine in size and content that can be read in just a few hours?

Still think you have what it takes to write a book? OK - let's take a closer look at what other problems are involved. Do you have the time to spare to spend several hours a day, each day and every day, on not only writing content but also spell-checking, proofreading and getting all that information in the correct order? Even if you are a seasoned writer of short articles this type of project is still far more demanding than any other form of writing.

There are however various ways of making the job easier such as getting others to help you write the content and double check everything for you before the final version is ready for publication but in the end most of the work will be down to you.

Hiring a professional ghost-writer is often a good way of doing things but it will cost a lot of money, depending on the work involved, to hire someone to help you with the work, more so, if they are having to dedicate long hours each and every day to get the work done on your behalf.

In conclusion therefore before trying your hand at writing a book it would be very wise to think about what is involved before putting pen to paper, or just like many others before you, the risk of failing will be high.

Don't Write A Book - write a page instead!

If you think the job is worth the effort then when you start writing just write one page topics at a time and build up a collection. When that collection of topics is large in size then start linking them together into a book format.

If you are one of those people who do a lot of writing, be it for your own entertainment reasons or for work based reasons, then do you still find the time to read other people's work?

It is not hard to imagine how tired your eyes and mind must be after writing, proof-reading or doing some other form of work of that nature all day long. So that being the case would you then go home and sit down and read a book, for example, or maybe a newspaper?

Although you may not think so, a lot of people do in fact read a remarkable amount of other people's work in various ways so as to find new ideas to write about or even in some cases looking for better ways to write about things themselves. Although to a degree this does help to develop your own written work it is still worth noting that your own writing style should be allowed to develop over a period of time all by itself in the main, in a natural way, rather than be influenced by others.

However, having said that, reading other people's work does help those who struggle when it comes to how and when to use commas and the such like by seeing how others do it themselves and, of course, hoping that they did it correctly in the first place as not all published work is necessarily word-perfect.

Being a writer is not an easy thing to do at times, more so, if working to a deadline.

Writing when done in your own time and not having to deal with anyone else is often something of a lonely and isolating thing as what you write is down to you and you alone but at least you can take your time and get it done when you feel like it. In the case of producing some written work for others then that is another situation altogether as your time is not your own and the need to complete the work in time for maybe a magazine, or some other form of publication, is often something that cannot be avoided.

Being a ghost-writer is also a job that has time restrictions, but not always, of course.

Being a ghost-writer and producing work for a client is often done by a pre-agreed arrangement in advance, but even then, such an agreement can also involve a time limit even though not always set in a strict way.

If you are new to writing then you may not come across the term ghost-writer before and although many people who are not involved in producing written work may think of it as something to do with writing about ghosts, a common reaction by many people I hasten to add, being a ghost-writer is very much a professional job.

At one time many people would hire someone to write things for them, a ghostwriter, while the client of course gets the credit for the written work done, but that is what a ghost-writing job is all about by the way. Many people these days however will do the work for themselves due to the introduction of computers and easy to use word-processing software that was not around years ago, but although ghost-writing services are not as popular these days, there are those who will still need such a service.

Today to earn a living from being a ghost-writer is a very hard thing to do with many people these days doing their own writing but there are those who, due to their position in life or the nature of what they do, will still need help from others in such a way.

When it comes to creative writing it should be noted that even a formal letter, or a formal form of writing is all creative to one degree or another. Most people will think of creative writing as storytelling, or poetry for example, but even an instructional article requires a good degree of creativity to make the content good. Even writing a formal letter to your bank manager asking him for more money requires a good degree of creativity if you want to get the result you are after.

Being creative is not just about projecting an image in the reader's mind but also about having good content. No matter how correctly a piece of written work is done with regard to accurate spelling, or even the general layout of the page, if the content is weak or hard to follow then all will be lost, or at the very least, overlooked by the reader.

Therefore being creative, be it for storytelling purposes or within a formal letter, is vital if the writer wants to get a good result.

Be it for pleasure or business reasons, even making a leaflet or a poster requires a good degree of creativity in the way it is worded so as to get a good result. So that being the case when it comes to sending a reply in letter form, always think of what you are writing as a creative work of art. Writing in all its forms is, when all said and done, an art form.

When some start writing in a more serious way for the very first time they tend to overlook the subject of storing and keeping their written work for future use.

They may write something and not think it worthwhile to keep but anything that you write does need to be stored as you never know when it will come in very handy in the future.

When storing any written work that you have done there are a number of options available to you that can range from printing your work onto paper and storing it in a folder, or box, to saving it on a memory stick or on the hard drive of your computer. The problem with storing your work on a computer or memory stick however is that if the PC, or storage device, breaks down then you could lose all that work. Therefore the option of saving it on a website or blog site of your own is a viable option as you can get to it from any computer at any time. You can even add your work to a website, but not publish it, until you are ready to do so.

The ideal way to backup your work however is to make copies of it and store it on both your PC, memory stick and also on your website, if you have one of course, so if one backup method fails in the future then you can fall back on the other storage methods that you have used.

On a final note also date your work and add your name to it.

It is well worth noting that blog sites are an ideal way of proving when you first published your work, for copyright reasons, as a blog site will date stamp your work for you, when you select publish, automatically.

What would be the point of writing if no one saw it?

In the case of writing articles, on any subject, the final aim of course is for people to see it but how would you go about doing just that?

Years ago the only true way of getting your written work published was to get a publisher, (publishing house), to take you on and turn your work into a book or some other form of public document, such as a magazine for example, and hope that it sold.

Needless to say the publisher would get paid for such a service, of course, unless you were in some way famous, like a famous actor or public figure for example, in which case a publisher would offer to pay you for your written work as they would know that such a well known person would sell many books and the publisher would make a lot of money without any real risks involved. However with the development of the internet all of that has now changed.

Today you can write and self-publish anything you want and at any time, day or night, without any true costs involved via a range of web and blog sites that offer such a service for free in the main, or better still, you can publish your own written work on your own website. In any event having your work published these days is very easy to do unless of course you want to see your work in print in a book or magazine and wish to make money from it.

To get your written work published in print takes money to cover ink, paper and of course production of the final thing in book or magazine form and if your work is not popular in the first place then both yourself, if funding such a thing out of your own pocket, and the publisher, I am sure, would not take such a risk when it comes to losing money over such a project.

However, offering to have your short articles published in a local newspaper, for free to get yourself noticed and started, is often a good way to get your foot in the door, and in addition, recognised by publishers as a writer.

Written by Dave J. Lomas

