

Writing a Strong Article

This guide exists because we know that many people who have something important to share about Christian leadership don't know where to start when it comes to writing it down.

Here are some basic ideas to help you get started.

Pinpointing Your Idea

You may have a million things to say about something but in writing your article, it is helpful to focus on a single idea.

Start by narrowing down the main idea of your article to a single sentence. Target the concept you want your readers to understand and accept by the time they finish reading.

First and foremost, think about your readers. How will your article provide something of benefit to them? What will they take away that will change their life in some way? Convey meaning and understanding. Tell your readers something they don't already know.

Ideally, your idea should be something you care about and that you believe your readers should care about. You will write a better article if you are passionate about your topic.

Outlining Your Structure

Once you have your theme, make a brief outline to support it and reveal new information to your readers. This will act as your road map as you write and provide structure for them as they join you on the journey.

Here's an example:

1. Introduction:

- a. **Hook** – This is the entry-point to your theme. It should be short, simple, and to the point. You want your readers to keep reading so you must engage their curiosity enough to stay with you to the end.
 - b. **Illustration** – Add humanity to your theme with a story (more on this later).
 - c. **Thesis** – This is your main point. Make it clear; make it singular; make it worth reading more about.
2. **Explanation:**
- a. Here you should have at least two main points that provide new information. Go for substance, not fluff.
 - b. Apply this to real life. What does it look like for your reader? How does it actually work?
3. **Conclusion**
- a. **Tie-in to introduction:** This is where you remind the reader of your hook and illustration, and maybe even resolve your story.
 - b. **Strong closing statement:** End with a call-to-action. What will you do now, fair reader? Make it clear, simple, and achievable.

Telling a Story

Everyone loves a good story, so figure out ways to include one in your article. How does what you're talking about affect you or someone you know personally? Help us enter into the story through a character's eyes (maybe yourself, or someone you know). Add humanity to the mix, especially at the beginning.

A great story usually includes three elements:

1. **Character:** Every story needs someone the audience can relate to and see themselves in. *The primary thing we should know about a character is their **motivation**.* What do they want? Transformation? Healing? Growth? Direction? Readers will relate to these motivations because we all have them to some extent.
2. **Conflict:** Characters should encounter *a **challenge or problem*** that they need to overcome. Without the possibility of failure, we don't care as much about a character. What problems are they facing?
3. **Resolution:** We want characters to ***choose the right path***, so tell us how they came to a resolution of their conflict. And as a result, ***show us the***

truth of the transformation. What are they doing now that shows they've truly changed or overcome that conflict? How is their change overflowing to others?

Pro Tip: Give your readers only half the story in your introduction. End at the conflict, so that they want to know what happened and continue reading. Then resolve the story in the conclusion to your article.

Writing it All Down

When it comes down to it, there's no getting around just sitting down and writing. This is the hardest part for any writer – professional or otherwise – so if it's difficult for you, you're in good company!

Here are some tips:

1. Set a time limit for yourself. Until that time limit is up, challenge yourself to stay glued to your seat and keep writing.
2. Pray before you start, asking for focus and the ability to communicate clearly and graciously.
3. Don't be concerned about the best way to say something. Just get it out on the paper. You can come back later and edit it (and you should)!
4. Turn off your phone and close the door. If you remember things you need to do, write them down on a piece of scrap paper and get back to writing.

The more you actually sit down and write, the more you grow as a communicator.

Editing

Once you've finished writing your article, set it aside for a little while. This could be anything from an hour to overnight. Give yourself some distance from it so you can see it with fresh eyes when you return to edit it. In the meantime, do something different to reset your brain.

When you return, here are some things to think about as you edit:

1. **Format:** Don't use huge paragraphs. Find natural points where you can separate a large paragraph so it is easier for the eyes to digest.

2. **Focus:** Did you communicate your big idea? Are there areas where you got off-topic? Trim and shape your article so that everything connects to your thesis.
3. **Read it aloud:** Does it sound natural, as if you were talking to someone?
4. **Use good grammar:** Focus on simple, strong verbs and nouns. Trim down unnecessary adjectives and adverbs. Write in the [active voice](#). Change up the length and complexity of your sentences.
5. **Cut out the fat:** Be brief, but potent. Lots of words often conceal a lack of actual substance. Look for places you've repeated yourself using different words. If it doesn't provide emphasis or a new way of looking at the topic, delete it. Keep it short and sweet.
6. **Be creative:** Use analogies and figurative language – but sparingly! Make sure it's a solid analogy.
7. **Check yourself:** If you're using Scripture, make sure you have checked the context. Verify your sources and claims.
8. **Ask a friend for help:** Have someone else read it for errors and readability.
9. **Title:** When it's all said and done, come up with a title that is urgent, unique, useful, and ultra-specific.

A note of encouragement:

Your goal is not perfection ... not even the best writers reach perfection! Your goal is to write your ideas down to the best of your ability. Once you've done that, send it on in to us – we're looking forward to reading it.

For further reading:

On Writing Well, William Zinsser

Elements of Style, William Strunk, Jr. and E. B. White