

Writing For How We Evolved To Connect

“Use Anglo-Saxon words! And stop saying you’re done. A cake is ‘done.’ You are ‘finished.’”

I grew up with these words from Mrs. Samson, my mother's legendary high school English teacher, but, with all due respect, she was completely wrong. All of our fussing about words and grammar... is missing the point.

Because ultimately, it's not the words that matter (I know, please keep reading before you roar back...) For about 100,000 years before we developed words, humans communicated with body language and sounds. We sense the emotion, energy, and subconscious “feel” of communication much more than grammar, spelling, or style.

Our Paleolithic ancestors were scanning the savannah for anything:

**entertaining
interesting**

**novel
useful**

**obviously helpful to somebody or
something we cared about**

Today, our nervous systems are still doing that.

If you discourse on cat anatomy, a few bio-nerds and vets may wander by. If you tell animal lovers how learning your cat's anatomy made you a better pet owner, they will all be riveted.

BEFORE (no errors, but facts and long sentences get in the way of asking readers to feel or think)

The first things most writers think about actually matter least: presenting a clear argument, sounding authoritative, marshaling facts, getting the words just right. This technical focus is a legacy of conventions developed by gatekeeping upper-crust Victorians determined to distinguish themselves from a newly literate rabble. In fact, all of our beloved grammar and spelling rules are largely unnecessary. Shakespeare is wildly popular, despite dating from an era when authors spelled words however they wanted.

Perfect grammar, pinpoint word choice, and elaborate sentence construction don't connect deeply with humans or even benefit them. Before permanent settlements 10-15,000 years ago, humans were much less concerned with fitting in and satisfying convention. They wanted to stay safe and find valuable resources. That same Paleolithic nervous system scans articles today. Readers evaluate the social media landscape though it were the savannah, dotted with potential threats and benefits. The worst thing writing can do is not be pinged as either one. Well-crafted arguments studded with abstract facts register as too safe and not helpful. Writers who want to find their readership must trigger humans' evolved curiosity: the urge to come closer and learn more. With AI tools, technically correct prose just gets writers to the starting gate. Those who only write safe, palatable, English-teacher-approved paragraphs will lose the race.

Note: take a moment to sense how you feel. Your nervous system probably responded to this with, “Oh, ok...”

AFTER (speaks to readers with challenges and solutions, more likely to get ♥ and 👍)

It's 150,000 BC. You're padding across a light scrubland in the fading twilight, and you notice a low bush dotted with red berries you've never seen before. Are they delicious or poisonous? Hard to tell from this distance. You elbow your buddy and raise your eyebrow in the bush's direction. She nods. **It's worth investigating...**

That's how we want readers to respond to our writing. Just think about that for a moment. Take it in.
Is it going to kill us or feed us? Either way, we've got to find out.

Once people click and get through the first couple sentences, it's our job to demonstrate that no, it's not poisonous, and yes, it is delicious... That's the Paleolithic path to finding our audience.

It feels like it could help, protect, or entertain us (too safe = boring) - In a chaotic landscape, humans avoid using precious attention or brain power on something that won't feed us or kill us. Few people will click on “How I Fell Asleep In The Sun.” Instead, try “How I Fell Asleep In The Sun After Being Up For 36 Hours Straight.” That combination of potential danger and something that can help is human nervous system catnip!

It feels like a real place (not too clean) - you don't have to share anything you don't want to, but people are drawn to real emotions and relatable human experiences: triumph, grief, satisfaction, frustration, joy, guilt, learning, discovering that everything you relied on is gone. Marvel movies feature human faces 10 ft tall, streaming with tears because we dig it!

It's fun, joyful, or funny (not just helpful, practical, or explanatory) – don't forget the *-tainment* part along with the *info*. Our brains register things that make us smile or laugh as “nutritious” because they help us relax and balance the stress of life. Are you having a good time writing your article? Help us feel it. Tell us why you’re smiling as you type.

It helps us get unstuck (we “feel” movement and progress) – Niches tend to stick to a single emotional tone.

| | |
|---|---|
| Health and Wellness – <i>100% peaceful or perky - snore!</i> | Political – <i>high-rant + cherry-picked factoids</i> |
| AI Alerts – <i>the world is ending / get on board or perish</i> | Historical – <i>all fact and background</i> |

But emotional mono-tone doesn’t ping a reader to investigate something new or grow. Human emotions and beliefs constantly change and update. Your article is written by a human. Where are its cycles and rhythm?

It presents danger we can handle (not too much anger or fear) – There's a fine line between "I want to investigate to protect myself” and "I need to run away because I am overwhelmed.” Add humor, hope, practical suggestions, patience, or a potential upside along with the fear and anger you have every right to express.

It “feels” like your best energy (we want to journey together) – *We sense your writing’s healthy energy, content, and emotion* before we register the actual words or logic. If other people’s methods make you feel worse, that’s counterproductive. Feel for what fits you. Listen for what lands with us. Don't be the teacher's pet. Find yourself.

Note: take a moment to sense how you feel. Did this make you feel or think anything? Could you leave a comment?

| MORE | LESS (or FEWER) |
|--|--|
| <i>Solutions</i> Emotional stories that entertain, attract, or intrigue Empathizing with your audience’s challenges Sharing your mistakes, growth, and lessons Some short sentences that land hard Metaphors, examples, alliteration, foreshadowing, contrast Shorter paragraphs, <i>italics</i> , bold , ALL-CAPS White space, color, images, columns, tables, dividers Appeal by using “I,” “you,” and “we” <i>Explaining the process</i> of getting from A to B Encouraging, celebrating small wins + incremental change | <i>Problems</i> Generalities, theories, facts, excessive background Launching right into what “people” should or shouldn’t do without acknowledging your audience and their challenges Complex sentences with elaborate subordinate clauses Latin- or Greek-origin vocab Extra, unnecessary words – <i>be ruthless in trimming fluff!</i> Try cutting your first draft 30-50% (This was five pages, but to be effective, I knew it had to get to two!) Berating your audience about <i>why they need to change</i> Presenting your success as though it were easy or simple |

How does your writing connect with the human nervous system? How do you want to grow?