
TIPS FOR WRITING WELL

Research-Based Principles

SCOTT ALKIRE

TESL-EJ Publications

Copyright © 2023 by Scott Alkire

All rights reserved.

No part of this book may be reproduced in any form or by any electronic or mechanical means, including information storage and retrieval systems, without written permission from the author and publisher, except for the use of brief quotations in a book review.

Managing Editor: Dr. Maggie Sokolik

Design: Elizabeth Collison

Copyediting: Carmi Brandis

Proofreading: Brian Taylor

Library of Congress Cataloging-in-Publication Data

Alkire, Scott

Tips for Writing Well: Research-Based Principles

ISBN 978-0-9823724-5-6

I. Alkire, Scott. II. Title.

Cover: *Composition*, Piet Mondrian, 1939

TESL-EJ Publications

Berkeley, California, USA & Kyoto, Japan

Contents

Preface: Why Research-Based Writing?	vii
1. Have Something to Say	1
2. Do Preliminary Research	5
3. Find Credible Sources	7
4. Find Sources That Evaluate Other Sources	8
5. Know the Value of Primary and Scholarly Research, and Data Analysis	10
6. Prepare an Outline	12
7. Choose a Paragraph Structure	16
8. Strike a Tone of Humility	21
9. Be Honest	23
10. Avoid Clichés and Ready-made Phrases	26
11. Use the Preferred Terms of the Discourse Community	28
12. Say What You Have to Say as Clearly as Possible	31
13. Understand the Terms in Your Discourse Community	33
14. Avoid the Passive Voice. Use the Active Voice Instead.	35
15. Use Details	37
16. Replace Slang and Legalese with Short, Common Words	40
17. Choose the Shorter, More Common Synonym	43
18. Omit Superfluous Words (Tighten Your Sentences)	45
19. Remove Dangling or Misplaced Modifiers and Participles	47
20. Find Buried Verbs (Nominalizations) and Change to Uncovered Verbs	51
21. Use Parallel Words	53
22. Check Your Quotations and Attributions	55
23. Take Care in Using Humor	57
24. Read Your Writing Aloud	59
25. Get Second Opinions (Personal, Professional, AI Chatbot, Etc.)	60
Essays	63

Epilogue: Putting It All Together	87
References	89
Notes	93
About the Author	97
Also by Scott Alkire	99

“Good writers are those who keep the language efficient.”

Ezra Pound

Preface: Why Research-Based Writing?

Research-based writing is more important now than ever. Billions of social media posts, news stories, and articles go around the globe daily, but how much of that content is based on accurate, reliable, and credible research? If we don't know, then how do we know what *we* write is accurate, reliable, and credible?

Seeking out research-based writing is our best chance at getting close to what we can hopefully call true in our writing—at least at the moment we're writing.

Research-based writing has a long history in Western civilization. Herodotus and Thucydides, who lived in Ancient Greece, wrote historical accounts that involved the collection of evidence and the analysis of events. Their accounts are valuable for their documentation and analysis—the same qualities we value and seek in non-fiction writing today.

Academic journals, which began to appear in the 17th and 18th centuries in Europe, provided a platform for scholars to publish

research-based writing. “Journal des Sçavans” (*Journal of the Learned*), founded in 1665 by Denis de Sallo, is one of the earliest academic journals. Published in France and covering a wide range of topics, including science, literature, and philosophy, it set a precedent for critical reviews of scholarly publications and was instrumental in promoting the spread of new scientific and intellectual ideas. Encyclopedias like Diderot and d’Alembert’s *Encyclopédie* aimed to compile and disseminate knowledge on a wide range of subjects. These reference works incorporated research-based articles and essays by scholars across Europe.

Tacitus, Copernicus, Galileo, Sir Isaac Newton, Gibbon, Burckhardt, and Michelet, among others, published work that acknowledged the discoveries and insights of those who had come before them. They weaved this existing knowledge into their own understanding of history and science. This practice of building on the work of earlier researchers is a fundamental aspect of the cumulative nature of historical understanding and scientific progress. It demonstrates how the work of one generation of scholars and scientists lays the foundation for the insights and discoveries of the next.

The practice of requiring students to write research-based theses or monographs in universities evolved with the formation of academic disciplines (e.g., chemistry in the 17th and 18th centuries), and the spread of academic publishing. The depth and quality of this work varied from one university and time period to another, but students and scholars have produced research-based writing since at least the Renaissance.

Finding quality sources of information is essential to good writing. To this end, librarians at the California State University, Chico, prepared what they call the CRAAP test. The CRAAP test is “a list

of questions to help you evaluate the information you find.” CRAAP is an acronym for currency, relevance, authority, accuracy, and purpose.¹

Another way one can potentially gauge the value of an academic article, thesis, monograph, or book is to look at the frequency with which it is cited in other works. Google's PageRank algorithm takes this factor into account, along with the quality and relevance of the content, the authority of the publisher or website, user engagement, and so forth.

This handbook introduces the importance of verifying information and methods for doing so, as well as selected principles for preparing a research paper. Two essays—one on money and banking and the other a preface to the memoir *Scotch and Holy Water*—appear towards the end of this book. They manifest, as much as possible, the research and stylistic principles advocated herein.

Have Something to Say

As obvious as it may sound, the most impactful research papers have something to say. They have a point of view on a topic that is new and meaningful for most readers. This is the foundation of a good research paper.

Whether your paper is to explore, persuade, analyze, or reflect, choose a topic that matters—to you and your readers. Then ask yourself, has it been explored before? If so, what hasn't been said about it already, or perhaps said insufficiently? That question can lead you to write your thesis question, which will eventually help you formulate your thesis. Your thesis question should not be too speculative, vague, or general; it should be realistic, thoughtful, and precise. How can you determine that? There are a few methods for getting feedback on a potential thesis question. One is to employ AI chatbots.¹

Exercise

On the following page, consider the topics and possible thesis questions. Query at least two AI chatbots (e.g., ChatGPT, Microsoft Copilot, Gemini, Grok, etc.) about which questions would be feasible for an eight-to-twelve-page research paper, including references.

Topic: Choosing a career

Feasible thesis questions?

1. How can personality, temperament, and IQ tests help young people find the occupation that may best suit them?
2. Based on current economic data, which occupations will likely be in demand 20 years from now?
3. What have longitudinal studies found about the effectiveness of high school and college counselors?

Topic: Effectiveness of American education

Feasible thesis questions?

1. Is there a correlation between small class sizes in elementary school and higher standardized test scores of students?
2. Do private high schools produce freer-thinking students than public high schools?
3. Why do students drop out of college?

Topic: Healthcare in the U.S.A.

Feasible thesis questions?

1. Is a single-payer healthcare system a viable solution to the high cost of healthcare in the U.S.A.?
2. Should healthcare in the U.S.A. be a fundamental human right?
3. Should healthcare in the U.S.A. be given first to those who contribute the most to society in times of resource scarcity?

Topic: Robert Frost's poem "The Road Not Taken"

Feasible thesis questions?

1. Can a case be made that Robert Frost's poem "The Road Not Taken" is about opportunity cost?²
2. Is "The Road Not Taken" based on logical fallacies?
3. Does "The Road Not Taken" reflect cultural assumptions?

Topic: *Finding a suitable person to marry*

Feasible thesis questions?

1. Historically, what methods have been most successful in helping people find suitable mates for themselves?
2. Do arranged marriages last longer than self-initiated marriages?
3. What are the reasons for different divorce rates in different U.S. states (or different industrialized countries)?

Topic: *Lack of self-esteem in K-12 students*

Feasible thesis questions?

1. To what degree do the academic performances of K-12 students correlate with their self-esteem?

2. What are the causes of low self-esteem in children?
3. How do K-12 schools that demand discipline affect students' self-esteem?

Of course, information from AI chatbots is only a starting point—think of it as brainstorming. Your next step will be to pursue more credible, reliable, and accurate information.

Do Preliminary Research

Preliminary research can be gainfully done in established encyclopedias. One of the values of seeking information in encyclopedias is that the information can vary from encyclopedia to encyclopedia. Differences can be in the number of subtopics of a given topic, the relative emphasis given to each subtopic, and information that is simply omitted. These inconsistencies may spark in you a thesis question that can lead to an original thesis statement.

Online encyclopedias and reference sources include:

- Encyclopedia Britannica Online
- World Book Online Encyclopedia.com
- Infoplease.com
- Citizendium
- Wikipedia

Older encyclopedias can be valuable if you are seeking to understand a particular time period and what scholars believed about

their disciplines then.¹ However, caution must be exercised in considering these views, as they may have been disproved or significantly supplanted by modern scholarship.

Find Credible Sources

Reference librarians can lead you to peer-reviewed journals, books, monographs, websites, and other media. These will, in most cases, be your most credible sources. Peer review is not a guarantee of credibility, but scientists, academics, and editors have a continuing belief (and vested interest) in peer review.

In addition, your professor and subject-area librarian at your college can often direct you to scholars and experts in the academic community. Arranging and conducting an interview with a scholar or expert on your topic can yield perspectives that may distinguish your paper when finished.

AI chatbots, as discussed, can produce valuable information about many topics, but they are not necessarily credible.

Find Sources That Evaluate Other Sources

Finding an authority who is skeptical of other authorities on a topic can give you valuable insights and provide ideas for your paper. Search engines, AI chatbots, your professors, or subject-area librarians can help you find such outliers. That said, finding knowledgeable, credible skeptics will not be as easy as finding established authorities.

An example of a skeptic with broad, deep knowledge of a topic—the Middle East from 1945 to 1969—was one-time U.S. Department of State employee and businessman Miles Copeland. His years of experience in and research about the region gave him a singular, albeit controversial, credibility. His knowledge was such that he felt confident dismissing certain sources on the Middle East and directing readers to more credible ones. In his book *The Game of Nations* (1969), Copeland wrote:

Most of the current histories of the Middle East one finds in public libraries are by scholars of the great universities who get their

information largely by taking in each other's washing, spiced up by infrequent visits to Beirut and Cairo, or by international newsmen who have only a passing familiarity with the area. The exceptional books under this category are as follows:" (p. 302; Copeland then provides an annotated bibliography of 34 titles.)

Copeland's bibliography represents a potentially valuable starting point for the researcher on the Middle East after WWII.

A 20th-century scholar on the Middle East with both academic and real-world bona fides is Bernard Lewis. Skeptical of sources of information on the Middle East as Copeland was, Lewis begins his work *A Middle East Mosaic* (2000) with a section titled "A Bundle of Prejudices." Quoting firsthand accounts by travelers to the Middle East from the 4th century CE to the 20th century, Lewis's selection of often negative generalizations of the region reminds the reader that even primary sources can be "unreliable as guides to Middle Eastern peoples and cultures" (p. 4).

The more you can cross-check your research and revise your writing as necessary to reflect your most honest understanding of your topic, the more credible your writing will be.

Know the Value of Primary and Scholarly Research, and Data Analysis

The most credible research will be based on:

- Primary (firsthand) knowledge (if possible)
- Academic (scholarly) bona fides (self and sources)
- Data (vetted data analysis)

In addition to these qualities, the article or paper must exercise caution, particularly if it makes claims that are unsettling. One paper that falls into this category was written by Allen Poteshman, who holds a PhD in Finance from the University of Chicago. Poteshman carefully presents relevant data on option market activity in the days prior to 9/11/2001. After analysis, he writes:

...the paper concludes that there is evidence of unusual option market activity in the days leading up to September 11 [2001] that is consistent with investors trading on advance knowledge of the attacks.¹

A book that holds significant credibility (ethos) on a sensitive topic is *End the Fed* (2009) by former congressman Ron Paul. His significant political experience lends weight to his claim that the Federal Reserve

...can create trillions of dollars and distribute them to its cronies without congressional oversight... (It) shows the arrogance of the members of the Fed and the complete apathy of the Congress in assuming its responsibility to protect the people and follow the rule of law. (p. 10)

Later, Paul quotes Anna Schwartz,² a credible source on the subprime mortgage crisis in the U.S.A.: “There never would have been a subprime mortgage crisis if the Fed had been alert. This is something Alan Greenspan must answer for.” And: “In general, it’s easier for a central bank to be accommodative, to be loose, to be promoting conditions that make everybody feel that everything is going well.” (p. 113)

The more you know about a topic from credible sources, the deeper you comprehend it. From this comes the possibility of extending the boundaries of knowledge of your topic.³

Prepare an Outline

Once you have selected a topic, gained an educational acquaintance of it, written a thesis question, and drafted a working thesis, prepare an outline. Outlines can be constructed in many ways; below is a generic structure.

Introduction

Hook/attention grabber, background information, thesis statement (*working answer to your thesis question*)

Body paragraphs (*see p. 31 for types*)

Topic sentence for each paragraph, supporting evidence or examples, analysis or explanation of evidence, transition to the next paragraph

Counterargument (*if required*)

Acknowledgement of opposing viewpoints, refutation of counterargument

Conclusion

Assessment of arguments, restate thesis

References

Three Sample Outlines

Should the Federal Reserve System Be Abolished?

- I. Introduction (a brief history of the Federal Reserve and its stated objectives, followed by a working thesis—e.g., a statement that the Fed should be abolished)
- II. The Federal Reserve has not accomplished its objectives
- III. It operates against the public interest
- IV. It is an instrument of usury
- V. It generates an unfair tax
- VI. It allows bad actors to go to war
- VII. It destabilizes the economy
- VIII. Counterargument: The Fed is necessary for the stability of the U.S. economy
- IX. Conclusion (assessment of arguments for and against the Fed, and a restatement of thesis)
- X. References

Adapted from Griffin, G. E. (2010). The Creature from Jekyll Island, American Media.

Single-Payer Healthcare: A Viable Option for Most Americans?

- I. Introduction (a brief history of healthcare systems in the U.S.A. since World War II, followed by a working thesis—e.g., a statement that single-payer would benefit most Americans)
- II. Overview of the current U.S. healthcare system
- III. Analysis of a single-payer healthcare system
- IV. Advantages of a single-payer system
- V. Disadvantages of a single-payer system

- VI. Case studies and international comparisons
- VII. Impact on healthcare providers
- VIII. Transitioning to a single-payer system
- IX. Public opinion and political feasibility
- X. Economic considerations and financing
- XI. Counterargument: Single-payer systems have not delivered healthcare that equals the quality of private health systems
- XII. Conclusion (assessment of arguments for and against single-payer healthcare and a restatement of thesis)
- XIII. References

Would Replacing the Income Tax with a National Sales Tax Benefit Most Americans?

- I. Introduction (an explanation of our current tax code and its drawbacks, followed by a working thesis, e.g., why a national sales tax would be better for most Americans)
- II. Individuals wouldn't file taxes, only businesses
- III. Basic necessities like food, personal care products, and children's clothing would be minimally taxed
- IV. Because the rich spend more, they will pay more tax
- V. Compliance will cost much less because there are far fewer businesses than individuals
- VI. People will have more privacy
- VII. We can repeal the 16th Amendment (income taxes were illegal before 1913)
- VIII. Tourists would contribute tax revenue when they shop
- IX. Counterargument: complexity in implementation; the existing industrial and political infrastructures built around our tax code would suffer fallout

X. Conclusion (assessment of arguments for and against a national sales tax and a restatement of thesis)

XI. References

Note: Outlines can vary considerably depending on discipline, not to mention topic and scope. Submitting a request to an AI chatbot for an outline in response to your thesis question can be helpful in getting you started.

Choose a Paragraph Structure

Key characteristics of a paragraph include:

- **Unity:** A paragraph should focus on a single main idea or topic, and all sentences within the paragraph should relate to and support that idea.
- **Coherence:** The sentences within a paragraph should be logically connected, with transitions or linking words to guide the reader from one sentence to the next.
- **Structure:** A well-structured paragraph often begins with a topic sentence that introduces the main idea, followed by supporting sentences that provide details, evidence, examples, or explanations related to that idea.
- **Length:** The length of a paragraph can vary, but it typically contains a sufficient number of sentences to develop and present the main idea adequately. In academic and professional writing, paragraphs are often three to five sentences long, but they can be longer or shorter as needed.

- **Indentation:** In handwritten or word-processed text, paragraphs are normally distinguished from one another by indentation at the beginning of the first line. In email and Web writing, paragraphs are often just separated by a line break.

The **PIER** (Point, Illustration, Explanation, Reflection) method encourages students to support their points (main ideas) with illustrations and explanations and then conclude with a reflection. Here are two examples:

Point: Capitalism is often destructive and exploitative.

Illustration and Explanation: It's no secret that the pursuit of profit can come at the expense of people and the environment. For example, construction companies may cut corners on safety or labor standards to reduce costs and increase profits, leading to harm to workers and future inhabitants of their buildings. Additionally, capitalism often allows the wealthy to benefit at the expense of the poor, perpetuating undeserved inequality and exploitation. Renters, many of whom are low-income, indirectly contribute to the tax deduction that homeowners claim on their mortgages, as the revenue lost due to the deduction is made up for by higher taxes on goods and services, which renters must pay for.

This is a problem that requires reflection and action from individuals and policymakers alike.

Reflection: We should prioritize social and environmental responsibility over profit and hold lawmakers and companies accountable for their actions. By doing so, we can create a more just and sustainable economic system that benefits everyone.

Point: State-guided capitalism is an economic system characterized by the state guiding and regulating market forces to achieve economic and social objectives that prevent the exploitation of the poor, elderly, and other vulnerable members of society.

Illustration and Explanation: In this system, private enterprise and markets exist, but the government helps shape economic outcomes through policies, regulations, and strategic investments that allow systems like single-payer healthcare, viable public transportation, and minimum wage laws to exist.

Reflection: State-guided capitalism represents a hybrid economic model where the state's influence is instrumental in achieving both economic growth and societal goals.

Other paragraph structures include:

- **TEEL Method** (Topic sentence, Explanation, Evidence, Link): **Topic sentence:** Introduce the main point or idea of the paragraph. **Explanation:** Provide context or background information related to the topic sentence. **Evidence:** Present evidence, examples, or data to strengthen your argument. **Link:** Connect the paragraph to the next one or summarize the main point.
- **PQE Method** (Point, Quotation, Explanation): **Point:** State your main point or argument. **Quotation:** Include a relevant quote or piece of evidence. **Explanation:** Explain how the quote or evidence supports your point.
- **Chronological Order:** Organize your paragraph's content in the order in which events or ideas occurred. This method is often used in historical or narrative writing.
- **Spatial Order:** Describe elements in the paragraph based on their physical location or arrangement. This method is

common in descriptive and travel writing.

- **Compare and Contrast:** Compare two or more subjects, ideas, or concepts, highlighting their similarities and differences. Each paragraph can focus on one aspect of the comparison or contrast.
- **Cause and Effect:** Explore the relationship between a cause and its effects or between events and their consequences. Start with the cause and then discuss the resulting effects.
- **Problem-Solution:** Present a problem or issue in the first part of the paragraph and then offer one or more solutions or strategies to address it.
- **Classification:** Group similar items, concepts, or ideas together within the paragraph based on common characteristics or criteria. Each group can become a separate paragraph.
- **Description/Definition:** Provide detailed descriptions or definitions of a subject or concept. This method is often used in expository and informational writing.
- **Narrative Structure:** Tell a story or recount an event with a clear beginning, middle, and end. This method is common in personal narratives and storytelling.
- **Problem-Evidence-Response (PER):** Identify a problem or issue, present evidence or data about the problem, and then respond with an analysis, solution, or conclusion.
- **Concession-Rebuttal:** Acknowledge opposing viewpoints or arguments (concession) and then present counterarguments or evidence to refute them (rebuttal). This is commonly used in persuasive writing.

The choice of paragraph structure depends on the type of writing you are doing and the content/ideas you want to convey. Effective

paragraphing enhances the clarity and coherence of your writing, making it easier for readers to follow your ideas and arguments. Different methods work better for different purposes and contexts, so consider your audience and the goals of your writing when selecting a paragraph structure.¹

Strike a Tone of Humility

As you read the work of scholars in your discipline, note the tone of humility that they strike, and the respect they show for their peers. You should do the same in your own writing.

The linguist Stephen Krashen recommends adopting a tone of apology by acknowledging the potential limitations of your work, and the areas for further research that may be needed. Academic discourse communities can be sensitive about who they accept, and newcomers can be viewed skeptically.

The following excerpt, from an unpublished monograph on the polyglot Dr. Kató Lomb, reflects a measure of humility and apology.

When we embarked upon our research, we recognized quickly the psychological depth of Dr. Lomb's language learning strategies. Some of her strategies, it appears, have their origins in cognitive processes that are not strictly linguistic. Thus it is with a spirit of deference that we present our work.

Acknowledging the inherent limitations of our study (Dr. Lomb passed away in 2003, before we could meet her), our understanding of Dr. Lomb's strategies is based on her books and the scholarship of those who interviewed her, most notably Dr. Stephen Krashen and Natalie Kiss. Dr. Krashen and Ms. Kiss published an article in 1996 on her language learning strategies. Our intention is to only contribute, in a modest way, to the ongoing interest in how Dr. Lomb learned 17 languages.

We recognize the potential gaps in our paper; we are not autodidacts in language learning, as Dr. Lomb was.

Nevertheless, we believe that we can add to the existing scholarship on Dr. Lomb's language learning through explication of her strategies.

We invite you to read our paper with an understanding of its limitations, and we welcome any feedback you may have.

Thank you for your consideration and understanding.

Be Honest

As obvious as it sounds, your credibility depends on your honesty. Yet even renowned writers and academics occasionally fail to be honest. There are, of course, different ways to be dishonest.

Experiential dishonesty can be defined as dishonesty from insufficient life experience and/or naiveté. It is evident in the following two excerpts by the normally redoubtable George Orwell:

You discover the extreme precariousness of your six francs a day. Mean disasters happen and rob you of food. You have spent your last eighty centimes on half a liter of milk and are boiling it over the spirit lamp. While it boils a bug runs down your forearm; you give the bug a flick with your nail, and it falls, plop! straight into the milk. There is nothing for it but to throw the milk away and go foodless.¹

“It is a great thing to die in your own bed, though it is better still to die in your boots.”²

It beggars belief that a destitute person would choose to go hungry because of a bug, or that he or she would find it better to die at labor (in his or her “boots”) than at home.

Dishonesty in the social sciences and humanities can take many forms, e.g. bias, distortion, intentional omission, sloppiness, plagiarism, and ignorance. The historian Howard Zinn has been criticized for some of these errors. His bestseller *A People’s History of the United States* (1980) presents a counter-narrative to traditional American history, emphasizing the struggles of marginalized groups. While it has gained popularity for its alternative perspective, some historians have accused it of intentional omission and ideological bias, arguing that it sacrifices nuance and accuracy for a particular agenda.

The critic Edward Said wrote a critique of Rudyard Kipling’s novel *Kim* in the introduction to the Penguin edition of the novel (1987). Said argues that Kipling presents Indians as static and monolithic characters who exist solely to serve British colonial interests. Although Said argues that Kipling is biased, Said himself reveals bias. In any case, the majority of 20th-century scholarship on *Kim* recognizes that Kipling’s portrayal of India is nuanced and complex and that his writing reflects the complexities of the colonial context rather than simply endorsing imperialist ideologies.

Dishonesty in science and statistics undermines the very ideals of the disciplines. *Lancet* editor Richard Horton said that “much of the scientific literature, perhaps half, may simply be untrue.” This statement was made in the context of concerns about the reproducibility and reliability of scientific studies, particularly in the fields of biomedicine and life sciences.

Theses that run counter to prevailing opinion or explore sensitive topics, regardless of discipline, require an extraordinary amount of

quality research and data to have a chance at being accepted. Hernnstein and Murray's findings in *The Bell Curve* (1994), despite being based on significant and relevant data, are not widely accepted. The same is true of Piketty and Goldhammer's findings in *Capital in the 21st Century* (2017).

The borrowing or **reappropriation of creative work** has a history too long to go into here. A few relatively recent examples include:

- *The Manchurian Candidate* by Richard Condon (1959). Condon's bestseller included phrases from Robert Graves's novel *I, Claudius* (1934).³
- *While England Sleeps* by David Leavitt (1993). Leavitt's novel plagiarized Stephen Spender's memoir *World Within World* (1951).⁴
- *How Opal Mehta Got Kissed, Got Wild, and Got a Life* by Kaavya Viswanathan (2006). Viswanathan's work plagiarized several novels by Megan McCafferty.⁵
- *Assassin of Secrets* by Quentin Rowan (2011). Rowan's novel contained passages lifted from various spy novels, including works by Robert Ludlum and Charles McCarry.⁶

In each case, save Condon's (his plagiarism was discovered after his death, and Graves's estate did not pursue legal action against Condon's publisher), the offending books were withdrawn and destroyed. Revisions of the novels were then released.

The advent of search engines, ebooks, and AI chatbots makes plagiarism theoretically easier to detect than ever before, though ChatGPT, to mention one AI chatbot, did not recognize any of the above cases as plagiarism.

Avoid Clichés and Ready-made Phrases

A cliché is an old word or expression that was once apt in a particular context, but now is used so much that it is boring and reflects dull thinking (e.g., “it is what it is,” “it’s all good,” “at the end of the day”). The writer or speaker simply hasn’t bothered (or was unable) to use a clearer or more thoughtful alternative.

But some clichés—“penny wise, pound foolish,” “a hard act to follow,” “startup mentality,” “crab mentality,” “imposter syndrome”—still communicate useful concepts and do not have easy alternatives. Nevertheless, avoid overused words and ready-made phrases in your writing. They do not show original thinking. Below are a few to steer clear of:

- You have to spend money to make money
- That’s a great question
- Think out of the box
- Reboot
- Research shows...

Tips for Writing Well

- The families of the victims are in our thoughts and prayers
- At the end of the day...
- Time heals all wounds
- Sex sells
- Money talks
- Go Spartans! (or any team)
- It's going to get worse before it gets better
- It's all good
- The new normal
- In today's society...
- It is what it is
- Less is more
- Literally
- Ugly American
- Your mileage may vary
- Poster child
- Old school
- Stay in your lane
- Above my pay grade

Reading widely, interacting with others, and paying attention to the media will attune you to cliches and ready-made phrases. A reader or editor who has experience in your discipline can catch cliches, outdated jargon, and ready-made phrases you may not be aware of.

Use the Preferred Terms of the Discourse Community

Discourse communities tend to reinforce their preferred words and terms, which often change over time. Thus, it is prudent to do a little research before using words and terms that pertain to particular professions, groups of people, academic fields, trades, etc.

Here are a few examples.

Old word/term → Preferred word/term

- Censored → Redacted
- Christian name → First name
- Cripple → Handicapped
- Dishwasher → Kitchen staff
- Fat → Husky, portly
- Fired → Laid off, downsized
- Forefathers → Ancestors
- Gambling → Gaming
- Illegal alien → Undocumented immigrant

Tips for Writing Well

- Janitor → Custodian or facilities staff person
- Maid → House cleaner, housekeeper
- Poor country → Developing nation
- Prisoner → Inmate
- Problem → Issue
- Remedial education → Academic support
- Removed from duty → Put on administrative leave
- Retarded (person) → Special needs
- Sales → Marketing
- Salesperson → Sales consultant
- School → Institute
- Secretary → Administrative Assistant
- Software product → Solution
- Store clerk → Sales Associate
- Teacher → Educator
- Used → Pre-owned
- Vagrant, bum → Homeless or unhoused person
- Waiter → Server

If you are unsure about a particular word or expression, query an AI chatbot such as ChatGPT, Gemini, or Grok (e.g., What is the preferred term for “remedial education”?). In most cases, you will want to use the preferred terms (and, by the way, augment the dominant views) of your discipline and your audience unless you have compelling reasons not to.¹

In your research of older texts, you may run across inappropriate terms. Keep an open mind. Inappropriate terms by themselves do not invalidate a text. In fact, the alternative of that— bowdlerized editions—should be avoided. Writers whose work has been bowdlerized include Charles Darwin, Jules Verne, Mark Twain, Sigmund Freud, Benjamin Graham, Carroll Quigley, Ian Fleming, and Roald

Dahl. Because these writers are deceased, we have no way of knowing whether they would have authorized the bowdlerized editions of their works or not. Such revisions raise serious cultural questions. To mention three:

- Revising a book without the writer's consent (or without, at minimum, the original version referenced) may compromise its intent, vision, and tone.
- Books are products of their time and reflect the cultural, social, and historical context in which they were produced. Bowdlerizations can and do obscure this, and without scholarly explanation, they can change how future generations understand the work.
- Revisions of books without the author's consent violate the author's freedom of speech.

Say What You Have to Say as Clearly as Possible

A scrupulous writer, in every sentence that he writes, will ask himself at least four questions, thus: What am I trying to say? What words will express it? What image or idiom will make it clearer? Is this image fresh enough to have an effect? And he will probably ask himself two more: Could I put it more shortly? Have I said anything that is avoidably ugly?¹

People think that I can teach them style. What stuff it all is. Have something to say and say it as clearly as you can. That is the only secret of style. (Attributed to Matthew Arnold)²

A superb list of more than 350 books on English usage is provided in “Appendix A: A Timeline of Books on Usage” in Bryan A. Garner’s *A Dictionary of Modern American Usage* (Oxford University Press, 1998). Newer and somewhat revised versions of Garner’s book are available: *Garner’s Modern American Usage* (3rd edition, Oxford, 2009) and *Garner’s Modern English Usage* (5th edition, Oxford, 2022). The careful reader will want to review and compare

each. Garner is an excellent essayist, but some newer editions omit essays that appeared in older editions.

Understand the Terms in Your Discourse Community

Writers need to understand the depth of certain terms in their discourse community. In business, terms such as liquidity risk, capital structure, optionality, hedging, mark-to-market (MTM), and even inflation can be framed and discussed in ways that go beyond the common understandings of them. “Inflation,” for example, in monetary economics is understood beyond the rate at which the prices for goods and services in an economy rise over time. Writers on monetary economics have discussed inflation in the following ways:

As a force that is manipulated indirectly to change the value of goods: The *Wall Street Journal* (5 June 2023) reported that “The money supply (M2), which should grow 4% to 5% a year to achieve 2% inflation, rose 15% a year from March 2020 to May 2020. That is three years’ worth of M2 growth in three months. By February 2021, M2 was a stunning 27% above its level a year earlier. Annual average M2 rose 19.1% in 2020 and 16.3% in 2021, and this excessive M2 growth caused inflation to take off.”

As a force that compounds over time: In a period of steady inflation, every new increase is typically (and misleadingly, some say) reported on top of the inflated prices of, say, six months ago, nine months ago, twelve months ago, etc. Monetary economists believe that for inflation to be properly understood, writers should report the total rate of inflation over a longer period time, not just the recent past.

As a force correlated with lower quality: The mere comparing of prices doesn't take quality into account. Quality assurance managers, as well as consumer advocates, have noted that the quality of most clothes, produce, furniture, and hand tools in the U.S. (to give four examples) has declined since the 1960s. So even if the prices of some of these products haven't risen, it is often because companies are finding ways to control prices at the expense of quality. This is often an effect of inflation.

If you are to write well, you must be aware of the depth of terms in your discourse community.

Avoid the Passive Voice. Use the Active Voice Instead.

Strong writing tends to be active, not passive. That is, in an active sentence, the doer does something. In a passive sentence, the doer is de-emphasized. For example:

Passive: The stock was bought by Warren Buffett.

Active: Warren Buffett bought the stock.

Passive: The subway wall was painted by Banksy.

Active: Banksy painted the subway wall.

Passive: The house has been inhabited by a rock band since January.

Active: A rock band has lived in the house since January.

Most times, you can identify the passive voice this way: Does the writer use a form of the verb “to be” with another verb in the past tense? Does the writer also use a prepositional phrase beginning with “by”?

Note that it's more difficult to recognize the passive voice when the object (the phrase introduced with "by") is omitted, for example, "The stock was bought."

When you write a sentence in the active voice, use an action or strong verb if possible. Avoid the verbs "to be" or "to have."

Exception to the above: The passive voice may make sense when you want to shift importance to an object rather than an actor in a sentence.

For example:

Active: The professor explained the **secrets of investing** to the students. *OK*

Passive: The **secrets of investing** were explained by the professor to the students. *Better*

Note: Academic, scientific, legal, and official (state) writers often use the passive voice if the agent is unknown or if they, for some reason, prefer not to disclose it. For example:

Passive: The earth was formed 4.5 billion years ago.

Passive: Swedish Prime Minister Olof Palme was assassinated on February 28, 1986.

Use Details

If you use specific words, the clarity of your writing will improve. Observe the difference between these two sentences:

OK: The university promised to offer affordable and healthy food choices to students.

Better: President Jim Clark promised to offer fresh fruits and vegetables to students for under \$10 per five-pound bag.

OK: The community came out last night in support of building affordable housing for its low-income residents in the city.

Better: Chinatown residents gathered in Washington Square Park last night to support the building of studio homes for low-income residents on Treasure Island.

OK: The convention featured farmers who displayed various organic apples from the Gold Country.

Better: The convention featured farmers who displayed

organic apples such as Red Delicious, McIntosh, Granny Smith, Fuji, and Honeycrisp from El Dorado County.

Finding the specific word for a new technology, trend, political movement, product, art form, etc. can be challenging. AI chatbots may be your best bet for finding them. If a word gains currency, it will eventually appear in the *Oxford English Dictionary (OED)*.

These words have appeared in updates of the *OED*:

- AI chatbot
- Antivax, anti-vaxxer
- App (mobile phone application)
- Bling
- Blockchain
- Blogosphere
- Bro
- Catfish (verb; to engage with others online using a fake identity)
- Decolonizing
- Digital currency
- Dog whistle (a coded message or expression that carries a hidden meaning understood by a particular group)
- Emoticon
- Gaslight (verb; to make another person doubt their own perceptions, memories, or sanity)
- Ghost (verb; to abandon a friendship)
- Humblebrag
- Manosphere
- Micromanage
- Non-fungible token (NFT)
- Own (verb; as in, to take control of a problem or situation)

Tips for Writing Well

- Photobomb
- Politically correct
- Safeplace
- Selfie
- Side hustle
- Toxic (adj; behavior that has a harmful effect)
- Woke

Replace Slang and Legalese with Short, Common Words

Slang refers to informal words, phrases, and expressions that usually emerge within specific discourse communities, often conveying attitudes, humor, or cultural identity. Slang is characterized by its departure from standard language norms and its ability to evolve rapidly within particular contexts. In general, you should avoid slang until you are familiar with the type of writing your company or institution produces. Ask your manager if there is a company style guide for you to consult.

You can find lists of slang for different discourse communities on the Internet. As you might expect, the lists change somewhat from year to year. Some slang expressions are cliches, which may be best avoided.

Examples of business slang that may or may not be acceptable include:

- Bandwidth

Tips for Writing Well

- Best practice
- Blue sky thinking
- Circle back
- Deal breaker
- Deep dive
- Drill down
- Elephant in the room
- Empower
- Game changer
- In the loop
- In the weeds
- Key take-aways
- Leverage
- Lowball
- On the same page
- Out of pocket
- Paradigm shift
- Ping
- Pivot
- ROI (Return on Investment)
- Run it by legal
- Silver bullet
- SWOT analysis (Strengths, Weaknesses, Opportunities, Threats)
- Synergy
- Take it offline
- Touch base
- Win-win

Legalese is a term for needlessly complex legal jargon and wordy and convoluted language. It can be found in legal documents and

contracts, as well as government and academic texts. Sometimes, legalese is used to obfuscate meaning rather than convey it.

An excellent resource on how to avoid legalese is *Legal Writing in Plain English: A Text with Exercises*, by Bryan A. Garner (3rd edition, University of Chicago Press, 2023).

Choose the Shorter, More Common Synonym

For example, use “end” instead of “terminate,” “explain” rather than “elucidate,” and “use” instead of “utilize.” When a shorter, simpler synonym exists, use it.

- Accommodate → Fit
- Apprise → Inform
- Assist → Help
- Beverage → Drink
- Cash flow → Cash
- Commence → Begin
- Consider → Think
- Correspondence → Letter
- Donate → Give
- Egregious → Flagrant
- Extraneous → Extra
- Inconsequential → Trivial
- Inform → Tell
- Initiate → Begin; start

- Locate → Find
- Location → Place
- Obliterate → Destroy
- Precipitation → Rain
- Prevaricate → Lie
- Proceed → Go
- Purchase → Buy
- Quintessential → Essential
- Render → Make
- Reside → Live
- Residence → Home
- Serendipity → Luck
- Sufficient → Enough
- Transmit → Send; forward
- Ubiquitous → Everywhere
- Visualize → Imagine; picture

Many writing guides recommend replacing longer, usually Latinate words with shorter, often Anglo-Saxon synonyms when possible. While this is a useful rule of thumb for making your writing tighter and punchier, consider Halpern's observation that Roget based his thesaurus on the view that there are no exact synonyms in the English language.¹

Omit Superfluous Words (Tighten Your Sentences)

Words are superfluous when they can be replaced with fewer words that mean the same thing.

- At the present moment → Now
- At the present time → Now
- At the same time as → While
- At this point in time → Now
- Because of the fact that → Because, since
- Despite the fact that → Although
- Due to the fact that → Because
- For the purpose of → For
- In close proximity to → Near
- In conclusion → Finally
- In light of → Because, since
- In my opinion → I think
- In order to → To
- In spite of the fact that → Although
- In terms of → Regarding

- In the absence of → Without
- In the event of → If
- In the near future → Soon
- In the neighborhood of → About
- In the process of → During
- In the vicinity of → Near
- In view of the fact that → Because
- On a daily basis → Daily
- On account of the fact that → Because
- Owing to the fact that → Because, since
- Prior to → Before
- Subsequent to → After
- With regard to → About
- With the exception of → Except for

Short, relatively concise sentences generally make the content clearer, in particular technical, scientific, and academic writing.

Remove Dangling or Misplaced Modifiers and Participles

Exercise: The following sentences are unclear because they have dangling or misplaced modifiers and participles. Rewrite them here or in a notebook. The first is done for you. You may use more than one sentence and change some words. Just make the meaning you wish to impart clear.

1. I strode into class with my friend confident.

Q: What's unclear about the sentence?

A:

We don't know if the speaker or his friend were confident.

Revision:

I confidently strode into class with my friend.

2. Now almost 79 years old, the nurse said Dad was in fine health.

Q: What's unclear?

A: _____

Write your revision:

3. While walking across a field, a large dog blocked our way.

Q: What's unclear?

A: _____

A: Write your revision:

4. The professor left the young student shaking his head in admiration.

Q: What's unclear?

A: _____

Write your revision:

5. The man ran out of the building on fire.

Q: What's unclear?

A: _____

Write your revision:

6. Driving down the street, the girl caught my attention.

Q: What's unclear?

A: _____

Write your revision:

7. I took a photo of a man with an antique camera on my way to school.

Q: What's unclear?

A: _____

Write your revision:

8. We saw Jennifer Ehle take a bow from the balcony.

Q: What's unclear?

A: _____

Write your revision:

9. As they are open-minded, the Andersons believe that 16-year-olds should be allowed to vote in local elections.

Q: What's unclear?

A: _____

Write your revision:

10. Because they were out of breath, the referees told the players to take an unofficial time out.

Q: What's unclear?

A: _____

Write your revision:

Definitions and examples of various “danglers” are given in Garner’s *A Dictionary of Modern American Usage* (1998, pp. 183–4).

Find Buried Verbs (Nominalizations) and Change to Uncovered Verbs

Buried verbs (or nominalizations) are nouns derived from verbs that can make sentences unnecessarily wordy and complex. Here are some sentences with buried verbs followed by sentences rewritten with uncovered verbs:

1. Buried verb: The **reviews** of the new film were done by the L.A. critics.

Uncovered verb: The L.A. critics **reviewed** the new film.

2. Buried verb: She gave her **approval** for the new director. Uncovered verb: She **approved** the new director.

3. Buried verb: A **discussion** about filming in Sevilla is under consideration.

Uncovered verb: We are **discussing** filming in Sevilla.

4. Buried verb: The **arrival** of the actor will be on Monday. Uncovered verb: The actor will **arrive** on Monday.

5. Buried verb: She provided **support** to me during the film.

Uncovered verb: She **supported** me during the film.

6. Buried verb: The producers made an **analysis** of the film's budget.

Uncovered verb: The producers **analyzed** the film's budget.

7. Buried verb: The university's attempts at **regulation** of which films can be shown on campus is controversial.

Uncovered verb: The university's attempts **to regulate** which films can be shown on campus is controversial.

Bryan Garner (1998) writes that buried verbs “ought to be a sworn enemy of every serious writer. In technical writing, they often constitute an even more serious problem than (the) passive voice.” (p. 98)

Use Parallel Words

Parallelism is a way of structuring a sentence, list, or paragraph by using similar patterns of words to create balance and harmony. It is also important because it makes writing clearer and more aesthetically pleasing.

Regarding making ideas parallel, Brooks and Pinson (1993) write:

In a series, all the items should be alike, whether all nouns, all gerunds, all infinitives, all phrases, or all clauses. If a series of verbs is used, they should all be in the same tense, voice, and mood. Subjects of parallel clauses should be in the same person and number. When two phrasal prepositions or conjunctions are used together, both need to be present in their entirety. (p. 73)

Three kinds of parallel structure are: **coordinate**, **compared or contrasted**, and **correlative**.

Coordinate a series of terms in parallel word forms

Poor: Richard Linklater’s “Before” trilogy features a man and a woman navigating the mysteries, *challenge, and joys of a relationship.

Better: Richard Linklater’s “Before” trilogy features a man and a woman navigating the **mysteries, challenges, and joys** of a relationship.

Compare or contrast terms in parallel word forms

Poor: Vince Guaraldi preferred improvising on stage more than *to manage studio sessions.

Better: Vince Guaraldi preferred improvising on stage more than **managing** studio sessions.

Place correlative conjunctions¹ immediately before the parallel terms

Poor: Gram Parsons’s records *both feature classic country songs and upbeat rock-and-roll numbers.

Better: Gram Parsons’s records feature **both** classic country songs **and** upbeat rock-and-roll numbers.

Many languages in the world are still primarily spoken. Some have no standardized writing system. Speakers of these tongues who are learning languages with standardized writing systems (in which parallelism is important) deserve special attention in the development of curricula for teaching parallelism.

Check Your Quotations and Attributions

Incorrectly or falsely quoting a source in your writing or failing to acknowledge the work of others damages your credibility as a writer. Your work may be rejected or, if already published, withdrawn and revised.

A book that falsely quoted a source was *Imagine: How Creativity Works* (2012) by Jonah Lehrer. The text included fabricated quotations from Bob Dylan. The author admitted that the quotations were not accurate, and the book was withdrawn, corrected, and republished.¹ The anthropologist David Graeber may have falsely quoted Henry Ford in *Debt: The First 5,000 Years* (2011). Graeber wrote, “Henry Ford once remarked that if ordinary Americans ever found out how the banking system really worked, there would be a revolution tomorrow” (p. 365). The quotation could be true, but Graeber provided no source for it, and none could be found as of 2023.

Historian Stephen Ambrose admitted that he “stole material profitably” from Joseph Balkoski’s book *Beyond the Beachhead* for his

own *Citizen Soldiers* (1997).² In another Ambrose book, *The Wild Blue: The Men and Boys Who Flew the B-24s Over Germany* (2001), the historian used passages from other authors' works without acknowledgment.³

Other works that have been called out for their unethical scholarship include Michael A. Bellesiles's *Arming America: The Origins of a National Gun Culture* (2000), about gun ownership and culture in early America. The book won the Bancroft Prize for history. However, historians noted its faulty research and data, and the award was rescinded.⁴ *Killing Lincoln* (2011), by Bill O'Reilly and Martin Dugard, had several historical inaccuracies and errors. Rae Emerson, the deputy superintendent of Ford's Theatre National Historic Site, discovered ten "factual errors," each different and one repeated several times. The factual errors were corrected in subsequent editions.⁵

If your research paper contains factual errors, fabricated quotes, or incorrect attributions, it can be rejected outright. If the paper is the product of a group project and just one writer makes mistakes, all group members may suffer consequences. Most universities have no committee to verify whether a student was aware that their project included mistakes from other group members.

Finally, be aware that the advent of the internet means that errors and transgressions made by writers, including students, can be put online and remain public indefinitely.

Take Care in Using Humor

Humor can be a powerful tool in expository writing, as it can help to engage and entertain your audience while conveying information. It may even distinguish your writing. However, it can also backfire. If you decide to use humor, note the following:

Know your audience: Humor is subjective, and what one person finds funny might not be funny to another. A satirical essay about fast food might go over well with a politically liberal audience (who may feel their tastes are “above” fast food), but may falter in rural America where fast food is judged less critically.

Use humor sparingly: While humor can be effective, it’s important not to overdo it. Too much humor can be distracting and even undercut any serious points you are striving to make. Tom Wolfe’s essay “Stalking the Billion-Footed Beast” alienated readers as much as it edified them about the state of American letters circa 1989.

Be subtle: Sometimes the best humor is understated. Use clever wordplay or subtle observations to inject humor into your writing.

without being too obvious. (“We tried to recreate the sound of the early Sun Studio records, but our equipment was too good”—A rock musician.)

Use humor to illustrate a point: Humor can be an effective way to illustrate a point or highlight a contradiction. Use humor to make a complex concept more accessible or to poke fun at a common misconception. David Foster Wallace often used humor in his essays to explore the absurdities of late 20th-century American life, for example, “A Supposedly Fun Thing I’ll Never Do Again” (1997).

Edit carefully: When using humor in expository writing, it’s especially important to edit carefully to ensure that your jokes land and your message is clear. Make sure your humor doesn’t detract from the clarity or accuracy of your writing.

Overall, the key to using humor effectively in expository writing is to strike a balance between entertaining your audience and conveying your message clearly and effectively.

Read Your Writing Aloud

Print out your writing and read it aloud. Your eyes and ears will pick up infelicities that you missed when reviewing your writing silently on your computer screen. Infelicities include:

- staccato fragments or sentences
- unintended alliteration
- overlong sentences
- loose generalizations
- pretentious vocabulary
- inappropriate vocabulary, slang
- tone-deaf humor
- clichés

Get Second Opinions
(Personal, Professional, AI
Chatbot, Etc.)

It is the rare writer who cannot benefit from a second (or third) opinion about what he or she has written.

The American anthropologist David Graeber ended his best-selling work *Debt: The First 5,000 Years* (2011) with an anecdote told to him by his graduate school adviser, the anthropologist Marshall Sahlins. The anecdote is about an encounter between a missionary and a Samoan, whom the missionary discovers lying on a beach:

Missionary: Look at you! You're just wasting your life away, lying around like that.

Samoan: Why? What do you think I should be doing?

Missionary: Well, there are plenty of coconuts all around here. Why not dry some copra and sell it?

Samoan: And why would I want to do that?

Missionary: You could make a lot of money. And with the money you make, you could get a drying machine, and dry copra faster, and make even more money.

Samoan: Okay. And why would I want to do that?

Missionary: Well, you'd be rich. You could buy land, plant more trees, expand operations. At that point, you wouldn't even have to do the physical work anymore, you could just hire a bunch of other people to do it for you.

Samoan: Okay. And why would I want to do that? Missionary: Well, eventually, with all that copra, land, machines, employees, with all that money—you could retire a very rich man. And then you wouldn't have to do anything. You could just lie on the beach all day (pp. 399–400)

It is easy to see the absurdity of the missionary's advice; that is Graeber's point. A reviewer, however, might point out that the story is absurd on a deeper, subtler level—an absurdity that undercuts Graeber's point. To wit: Who is really like the "Samoan," content to lie on the beach, "wasting" his life? With rare exceptions, humans all desire a mission of some sort. Not doing "anything" and laying on a beach "all day" is not a recipe for human fulfillment.

It is important to know that writers can be blind to the flaws in their own work. The phenomenon where a writer is unable to see flaws in his or her own work is often referred to "proofreading blindness" or "self-editing blindness." Peers who are not afraid to be honest with you are worth seeking out as reviewers.¹ If your campus has a writing center, seek a review from a tutor. If your professor is willing to read your work, take advantage of the opportunity. Last, AI chatbots can (but not always) identify plagiarism,

grammar errors, lapses in logic, or awkward phrases that human reviewers may miss.

Essays

The following essay is an attempt to put into action some principles of good writing. The writer has no background in the subject matter; his effort is included merely to show that the application of a few research pointers and writing tips can give even the most uninformed writer a fighting chance at making sense of a topic. Any errors are his responsibility.

Essay

NOTES ON MONEY AND BANKING

“Behind every great fortune there is a crime.”

—Balzac

For better or for worse, we all must deal with money. Therefore, it is essential that we know something about it. Unfortunately, we have

no national curriculum requirements for teaching what money is, how it is created, how our financial system operates, and how our system is regulated by rule of law.

What we call money—a medium of exchange and a store of value—is a relatively new invention in human civilization. Traditionally, anthropologists believed that early societies lived without it; they were largely self-sufficient. When they lacked something, they would barter for it.¹ A Coast Miwok tribe had salmon and an Ohlone tribe had leather hides—they traded.

Wechsler (1999) writes that “this sort of economy was predicated on what the economist W. S. Jevons has called ‘the double coincidence of wants’ ” (p. 26)

But barring such a coincidence, trade became complicated. As such exchanges became hard to manage, certain items (e.g., gold, silver, bronze, and copper) were used instead. Wechsler notes that these items became “standards by which other potential items of trade could be measured. These ‘commodity moneys’ had to fulfill certain requirements—they needed to be convenient to transport and store and subdivide, and they needed to be somewhat durable...” Precious metals were also used for ritual gifts and to facilitate human relationships.

Metals had intrinsic problems. While coins were much more convenient to store, transport, and protect than produce or livestock, they were still vulnerable to theft at home and on the road. Furthermore, as trade with the East grew, precious metals left Europe. Compounded with the problem of hoarding, Braudel (1979) notes that “it meant that at times, in certain places, the currency of exchange would dry up almost completely, at which point trade would become, in the words of one contemporary witness, ‘an occu-

pation of much perplexity' ” (p. 446). When a precious-metal-based economy runs out of precious metals, how is trade then conducted?

AN ANSWER TO THE SHORTAGE OF PRECIOUS METALS: BANKS

In 1682, the Englishman William Petty wrote a question-and-answer manual titled “Quantulumcumque Concerning Money” (loosely translated, “The Least That Can Be Said Concerning Money”). Question 26 was:

“What remedy is there if we have too little money?”

Answer: “We must erect a Bank, which well computed, doth almost double the Effect of our coined Money: And we have in England materials for a Bank which shall furnish Stock enough to drive the Trade of the whole Commercial World.” (pp. 6–7)

In 1694, William Paterson and a group of investors founded the Bank of England. In their prospectus to secure support through a subscription model where investors could invest in the bank, Paterson adopted Petty’s idea. He explained, “The bank hath benefit of interest on all the moneys which it creates out of nothing.”²

This was Paterson’s concept of what we now call **fractional reserve banking**. In greatly simplified terms, fractional reserve banking is the process by which a bank creates money (originally on ledgers, now electronically) in the form of loans and deposits. A bank does this when it receives funds in its accounts. When it receives this money, it allocates a percentage of those funds (e.g., 10%) to a central bank. Once this requirement is satisfied, the bank may create \$9 for every additional \$1 it holds in reserve.

The bank doesn't create physical money for its vaults; it creates digital money on its computers in the form of loans and deposits within the banking system.

Requests for loans drive the creation of money. A new loan from one bank (e.g., to a homebuyer) leads to a deposit in another bank (the bank of the home's seller). This deposit, in turn, becomes the basis for more loans, thereby expanding the (virtual) money supply.

With fractional reserve banking, banks lend out more money than they have in physical cash. The system works because only a small percentage of the banking system's money, relatively speaking, is ever withdrawn in hard cash (or possibly, before 1933, in gold or silver).

ALEXANDER HAMILTON AND CENTRAL BANKING

Alexander Hamilton, the first secretary of the Treasury (1789-1795), championed the idea of a central bank, run by private bankers, to create money through fractional reserve banking. Hamilton and his followers believed that a strong central bank would be less likely to tamper with the distribution of money than politicians. To this end, Hamilton helped establish the First Bank of the U.S. (1791), a central bank composed of privately owned banks.

Hamilton told certain congressmen that they could be on the boards of trustees of the private monopoly banks via "subscriptions" if Congress would allow the banks to handle the business of issuing credit and paper money (printed on demand by the Mint if necessary). The banks paid the government for the right to issue (as loans) twenty times as much money in paper as they actually had in real gold backing. Beard (1946) notes that James Madison, writing to Thomas Jefferson in July, 1791, said:

[Hamilton's] subscriptions [to the First Bank of the U.S.] are...so much public plunder, which will be engrossed [taken] by those already loaded with the spoils... (pp. 125–6)

Ginsburg (1974), in his summary of Ezra Pound's views of U.S. monetary policy in Pound's *The Cantos*, explains the system bluntly:

...the point is the franchise is bought by a group of private monopolists; from then on they own the banking businesses, so in that sense, because they paid the government off one million, and they got a million in the basement, they suddenly, on paper, own \$18 million more than what they started off with. So just like in the twinkling of an eye they've got \$18 million more. I don't have \$18 million more, the government doesn't have \$18 million more, the farmer doesn't have \$18 million more, but this group...has \$18 million dollars.

In what form? They had it in the form that enables them to write a piece of paper saying 'I'm as good as money'—a check. In other words I'm a farmer and I need a thousand dollars, so I can go to the bank and get a piece of paper...a check...worth a thousand dollars...And so in a sense it was as if the banks were printing paper money, printing dollars, because the government backed the bank and said, 'Yes, you've given us this million, therefore you have our government backing, go ahead...lend out money.' (pp. 175–6)

California Representative Jerry Voorhis, in his book *Out of Debt, Out of Danger* (1943, 1991), accepted fractional reserve banking, but opposed it being done by private banks and the Federal Reserve. Voorhis wrote:

Money creation is the greatest economic power known to man. That power ought always to be exercised in the interest of all the people, never for the sake of private gain or a privileged few.

The banks—commercial banks and the Federal Reserve—create all the money of this nation, and the nation and its people pay interest on every dollar of that newly created money.

This means that private banks exercise un-Constitutionally, immorally and ridiculously, the power to tax the people. For every newly created dollar dilutes to some extent the value of every other dollar already in circulation. (p. x)

EXPIRATION OF HAMILTON'S FIRST BANK OF THE U.S.

Both John Adams and Jefferson believed that private usurpation of the control of a nation's treasury ran against the spirit and the letter of the American Constitution—as in Article I, Section 8: “The Congress shall have Power: To coin Money, regulate the value thereof, and of foreign Coin.” Hamilton's First Bank of the United States charter faced controversy and debates regarding the constitutionality and role of a central bank, and the bank's charter expired in 1811. Only five years later, however, Nicholas Biddle came up with a plan to restore it—as the Second Bank of the U.S.

ANDREW JACKSON VS. THE SECOND BANK (THE BANK WAR)

In 1816, Congress gave a new central bank, the Second Bank of the U.S., the power to control the nation's money, an abdication of its responsibility as stated in Article I, Section 8 of the Constitution. Nicholas Biddle was the bank's president. President Andrew

Jackson (1829–1837) opposed it because he believed a central bank under private control to be, as Madison and Jefferson had earlier, a corrupt institution that favored the wealthy and powerful at the expense of the general public. Jackson also believed it to be an infringement on states' rights.

After winning re-election in 1832, Jackson vetoed the bill to renew the Second Bank's charter. In 1833, he withdrew federal deposits from the bank and redistributed them to state-chartered banks. The Second Bank's charter expired in 1836, leading to its demise.

Jackson's fight against the Second Bank is known as the Bank War.

THE CIVIL WAR, BANK PANICS, AND THE CREATION OF THE FEDERAL RESERVE

To fight the Civil War President Lincoln needed money. He gave concessions to bankers to secure loans. And he also did an extraordinary thing: he exercised the long-unused right of the government to control its own coinage by issuing bills called greenbacks to fight the war. These were pounced on by his financial enemies and ridiculed as inflation makers.

Ironically, these enemies, when they gained power, contributed to the bank panics of 1873, 1893, and 1907, which raised inflation. These panics were used by some politicians and bankers as justification for the Federal Reserve Act of 1913.

President Woodrow Wilson, Senator Nelson Aldrich, banker Paul Warburg, Representative Carter Glass, and banker Henry P. Davison (J. P. Morgan & Co.), among others, developed and promoted the Act. They presented it as a move to establish an independent institution to prevent further bank panics and ensure

monetary stability. Others disagreed. Louis D. Brandeis, a lawyer who would become a Supreme Court Justice, opposed the concentration of power in financial institutions and expressed concerns about the potential influence of the banking industry on the Federal Reserve. Charles A. Lindbergh Sr., congressman from Minnesota, strongly opposed the Act. He argued that it would eventually allow the banking elite to dominate the country's monetary system, leading to inflation, economic instability, and reduced government control over currency issuance. Henry Ford, Andrew Carnegie, and Joseph P. Kennedy, among others, shared this view.

Yet, the Act passed. Afterward, just as critics had predicted, there was heavy taxation (the only way the government could raise money, for the Fed controlled the creation of money). This increased personal debt and reduced the flow of money in the economy. This outcome was in direct contrast to the taxless, debt-free, abundant society that some Jeffersonians envisioned.

FATEFUL MONDAY—MAY 20, 1920

Monetary decisions got worse from there. Voorhis (1943, 1991) points to the Fed's meeting on May 20, 1920 as a particularly dark day:

...it is probable that in all the history of our country, there has never been a more coldly deliberate and calculated destruction of the nation's prosperity and its property values than was carried out by order of the Federal Reserve Board as a result of its meeting on May 20, 1920...

At this meeting...it was decided to contract the money supply of the nation...all banks were urged to raise their rate of interest on loans to 7% and to insist upon prompt repayment of outstanding

loans... Billions of dollars of farm, home, real estate, and industrial values were swept away... (p. 122)

The U.S. economy began recovering in 1922, but the Fed failed to control economic opportunists. The combination of the Fed's easy monetary policy during the boom and the subsequent tightening in the late 1920s contributed to the unsustainable conditions that led to the stock market crash and the Great Depression. Ron Paul, in his book *End the Fed* (2009), notes that Fed Chairman Ben Bernanke addressed this in his comment to Milton Friedman at a dinner honoring Friedman's ninetieth birthday on November 8, 2002:

(Bernanke) apologized to Professor Friedman and said Friedman was absolutely right—the Depression was the fault of the Federal Reserve. It wasn't the fault of the central bank managing a fiat currency or participating in credit expansion or debt monetization; the problem lay only with the Federal Reserve's inability or unwillingness to inflate the currency early and massively starting in 1929.

Bernanke closed his remarks by directly addressing Friedman: 'You're right, we did it. We're very sorry. But thanks to you, we won't do it again.' (pp. 110–1)

RESISTANCE TO THE BANKS' CONTROL OF U.S. MONEY

From Alexander Hamilton's time to the present, statesmen, academics, businessmen, and economists have questioned or challenged the United States's decision to have a central bank composed of private banks control its money. Presidents Jefferson, Madison, Jackson, Van Buren, and Lincoln opposed, or at least advocated for strict control of, such a collective.

Other opponents, aside from the aforementioned Brandeis and Lindbergh Sr., included William Jennings Bryan and economists E. C. Harwood and Ludwig von Mises. Later 20th century and 21st century critics of the (now) U.S. Federal Reserve include Paul Craig Roberts, Ron Paul, David Stockman, Christopher Leonard, Peter Schiff, and Lev Menand.

In recent decades, the undisciplined actions of the Fed have justified these critics' concerns. Lack of regulation, fraud, and over-lending led to the Savings and Loan (S&L) crisis, which began in the late 1970s and extended into the 1980s. The Fed intervened to rescue failed S&Ls. The Fed's intervention in this crisis was a significant bailout operation that cost taxpayers billions of dollars.

The 1980s saw various U.S. banks facing financial difficulties, particularly due to problems related to real estate lending. In some cases the Fed provided financial support, and certain banks were bailed out or merged with healthier institutions to prevent their collapse.

The subprime mortgage crisis, also known as the global financial crisis, began in 2007 and impacted the global economy for years. It was triggered by the bursting of the U.S. housing bubble, which was driven by the widespread issuance of subprime mortgages (high-risk loans) and the subsequent collapse of the housing market. It led to government bailouts, capital injections, and support measures for various U.S. banks. Leonard (2021) cites November 2, 2010 as a day

...that should live in infamy. It was the day when America's democratic institutions retreated to the sidelines of economic policy-making and largely left the nation's economic development to the Federal Reserve. The result was a decade of printing money that

has primarily benefited the very rich and stoked asset prices in ways that continue to destabilize global financial markets. (www.time.com).

It is estimated that government/Federal Reserve bailouts cost U.S. taxpayers hundreds of billions of dollars. (In contrast, the Canadian financial system, including the Bank of Canada, had [and still has] stricter regulations and lending standards. Canada had no high-profile bailouts of financial institutions equivalent to the major bailouts seen in the U.S., such as those of Fannie Mae, Freddie Mac, and several large U.S. banks.)

FROM COMMODITY MONEY TO FIAT CURRENCY

From 1792 to 1933 a U.S. bill could be redeemed for gold or silver coins equal to its denomination (some state-chartered banknotes were not recognized in all states, however). In 1886, the five-dollar silver certificate featured an image of five silver dollars on its back. From 1905 to 1933 the back of a \$20 bill featured the depiction of a double eagle, a gold coin worth twenty dollars. U.S. currency thus represented **commodity money**.

The redemption of U.S. bills for gold and silver was canceled in 1933. Today, U.S. money is **fiat currency**, meaning its value is based on the trust and confidence of the people who use it and the stability of the U.S. government. It is not backed by a physical commodity.

The combination of fiat currency and fractional reserve banking can be perilous. It can lead to the excessive creation of money, which can lead to inflation and financial instability.

Banks may take on more risk than they otherwise would because they know they can rely on the Fed for support if things go wrong. This can lead to reckless behavior and financial crises.

The benefits of money creation often accrue to those who receive loans first, such as banks and large corporations. These entities can buy assets and generate profits from them before the money is available to ordinary citizens. This occurred after the 2008 financial crisis when financial institutions received funds through TARP (Troubled Asset Relief Program).

Last, fiat currency and fractional reserve banking have encouraged a debt-based economy in which individuals, businesses, and governments become heavily reliant on borrowing to finance their activities, potentially leading to debt burdens and financial vulnerability.

POST-FEDERAL RESERVE ACT MONETARY POLICIES

Statistics show that U.S. monetary policies have decreased the purchasing power of the U.S. dollar. Since WWII the policies have gradually contributed to wealth and undeserved income inequality. Expansionary monetary policies, such as quantitative easing, have inflated asset prices and generally benefited only owners of large businesses, those with significant investments, or those with assets (e.g., commercial and private real estate).

The average worker with only a savings account has, in fact, lost money due to inflation.

To be sure, since the 1960s, the outsourcing of industries such as manufacturing, IT, software, customer support services, textiles, and apparel has lowered consumer prices. However, this has often meant a trade-off in quality and, in almost every case, a loss in

domestic jobs. Overall, outsourcing has contributed to wealth and undeserved income inequality. While the Fed is not directly responsible for the growth of outsourcing, its dual mandate, as defined by the Full Employment and Balanced Growth Act of 1978 (also known as the Humphrey-Hawkins Act), states that the Fed should pursue policies to promote both maximum employment and stable prices.

CENTRAL BANKING TODAY

The central bank system is the most widely accepted approach for managing money in the world.³ In theory, the delegation of money supply control to a central authority allows for expertise, independence, credibility, and long-term perspective in managing the economy, which can be advantageous for promoting stability and sustainable economic growth. Unfortunately, many central banks (and in the U.S., the Fed) have a history of serving corporations, government policymakers, and the wealthy at the expense of the middle class, the working class, and small businesses. One way they do this is by expanding the supply of money, which is inflationary. As stated previously, U.S. banks, via the Fed, create “credit money” every time they make a loan. The credit money has purchasing power and is indistinguishable from a real deposit of cash into a bank account. The Treasury funds this lending by issuing Treasury securities, including T-bills, and the Fed, among other entities, purchases these securities. This expands the supply of money.

When the government borrows from banks or other entities, those entities provide the funds with the understanding that they will be repaid with interest. This implies that the money borrowed is real and represents a debt obligation for the government. The repayment is typically made in real money, either through the issuance

of new debt or through tax revenue and other sources of government income.

This machination has been called an abuse of central banking power. Walter Bagehot and Henry Thornton posited that a central bank should serve as a lender of last resort. Furthermore, they argued that central banks should take only good collateral and charge high rates of interest. The point of a lender of last resort isn't to save all debtors, but to provide a lifeline to those who were already good financial stewards before their need for money.

The Fed and some other central banks have done the opposite. They take virtually any form of collateral and charge little to no interest, thus prolonging the existence of poorly managed businesses, speculative land holdings, declining residential property, etc.

As Voorhis made clear, almost every government in the world is in debt because of this system. As a result, taxpayers become responsible for paying off their government's debt, plus the interest on it. Generally speaking, this is caused by the actions of private banking institutions, and the fact that no country strictly limits its money supply by a reserve requirement.

WHY DEBT IS ENCOURAGED

Governments encourage debt because bank loans are the primary source of money for their economies. Millions of people borrow money to buy cars, remodel their homes, buy second homes, etc. In turn, the car dealers, contractors, and home sellers deposit the money in their own banks. This is called deposit expansion, and these deposits become the basis for yet more loans (which come from the banks' entries into their computers, not their vaults). The

new loans create more money because they must be paid back (with interest) in real money. And so the money creation process continues, with the government contributing by borrowing precisely the same amount of created money from the banks.

Voorhis proposed that banks should only receive deposits from customers and make loans to, and investments in, customers. Furthermore, he stated that money should only be created and controlled by governments, not central banks:

A Federal Reserve System brought under control by the elected officials of the United States could be run in the public interest, instead of...the moneylending community, as is now the case. (p. x)

Lev Menand, in *The Fed Unbound* (2022), writes that the Federal Reserve system remains:

...economically and politically unstable. It undermines the legal framework governing money and finance and threatens our democracy. Among its shortcomings, it depends on central bank actions that, though designed to avoid worse outcomes, transfer wealth to the financial sector and increase inequality. (p. 15)

WHAT CAN BE DONE?

The coronavirus pandemic has shown that there is a different way to boost growth than to transfer wealth to the financial sector. Leonard (2021) writes:

In 2020, Congress sent billions of dollars directly to people... Emergency loans were given directly to small businesses, rather than just big banks. Billions of dollars was spent to solve real-world prob-

lems like vaccine development and medical equipment production, rather than just propping up financial markets. The results were immediate. The poverty rate fell quickly and hit the lowest level since 1967. Hundreds of millions of vaccine doses were administered.

Millions of jobs were regained after the lockdown... (www.time.com).

Until we vote in a Congress that agrees that the Federal Reserve System should be run in the public interest, we can at least practice the fiscal responsibility we want our government to exercise. As Andrew Carnegie once wrote boldly, it is our duty.

Essay

This essay served as the preface to the second edition of John D. Tumpane's expat memoir *Scotch and Holy Water* (TESL-EJ Publications, 2019). Research for the essay consisted of conversations with the Tumpane family, a review of Mr. Tumpane's personal papers, and an interview with a close friend of Mr. Tumpane. As with "Notes on Money and Banking," this effort is included to show that the application of a few principles of research and good writing can give the beginning writer a shot at writing a serviceable essay.

PREFACE

Drinking and holy water are two things you might not associate with Turkey, but you can't miss them in John D. Tumpane's 1960s

memoir of the country—particularly the drinking. *Scotch and Holy Water*—Tumpane’s account of his years living in Diyarbakir, Izmir, and Ankara—describes plenty of imbibing. It also describes expeditions to ruins, hijinks in nightclubs, and wacky interactions with Turks, Kurds, and expatriates. Although astute and entertaining, the book was never picked up by a publisher. Tumpane self-published his memoir in 1981 but, without national distribution and marketing, his midlife escapades went largely unnoticed. The casual reader today, when perusing the 1981 edition, might mistake the book for just another collection of callow expat anecdotes.

The judgment would be off the mark. After moving to Diyarbakir in 1958 to work for a U.S. military contractor (The Tumpane Company, founded by John’s older brother Jim and their uncle), Tumpane plunged intrepidly into his new environs. He packed his weekends with spirited socializing and archaeological outings. His enthusiasm did not come, however, without rash, often naive decisions. He spends his way into and out of trouble. He struggles to manage multinational employees who unwittingly insult each other. He attempts to drive over a snowy pass without chains—at night.

All of these trials and more Tumpane relates in funny, vivid, and dramatic prose. Collected from ten years of vigorous living in the eastern half of the Roman Empire, the stories have a rare ethos.

Tumpane deepened his experience in Turkey by exploring ruins at every opportunity. He evocatively describes the sites he visits. His impression of Miletus, the greatest Greek city in the eastern Aegean prior to 500 B.C., reveals his skill at the offhand sketch:

We arrived at Miletus at two o’clock. Miletus was once on the sea, at the mouth of the Meander River, but the river had silted up. Now

there was only a stagnant inlet in front of the magnificent marble stairs leading up out of the green slime. It was easy to imagine the Emperor Hadrian arriving in his burnished barges, or St. Paul in a rowboat with Timothy pulling the oars.

Everything at Miletus was in shambles except for the theater. Unlike most ancient theaters, which were built on the side of a hill, this one was freestanding, next to the sea, with its own special harbor where you could anchor your barge to see a play by Euripides or Aristophanes. For a theater that had had no reconstruction, it was in marvelous condition. There was a huge vaulted semicircular tunnel underneath with inside stairways leading up to the highest tiers. The theater held 25,000 spectators. (p. 250)

When not reimagining the past through the sites he visited, Tumpane lived very much in the present. He renders hilariously his adjustments to Turkish daily life. He jousts with Turkish civil servants over absurd regulations, slyly rescued and restored neglected artifacts, and enjoyed the pleasures of Turkish nightclubs.

Occasionally, he makes politically incorrect statements. Early in the book he takes on *Inshallah* (literally, “if Allah wills it,” but more easily understood in English as “hopefully”):

I wasn't the only one who learned to loathe the word *Inshallah*. I've seen many Americans grab a Turk by the throat and say, “Don't give me that *Inshallah* shit!” But to the Turk, it was quite logical. You make an appointment for a Turk to come to your house for an important meeting at five o'clock sharp, and he says, “*Inshallah*” knowing full well he has an airline ticket in his pocket to take his dying grandmother to a hospital in Ankara that very same afternoon. But maybe the weather would be bad, and the

plane wouldn't fly; then he would cheerfully come to your house on time.

While reading the Koran one night, I was humbled by a footnote. It seems that Mohammed was asked a sly question by some of his skeptical followers, and he said, "I'll have the answer for you tomorrow." That night he got no revelations from Allah. Nor the next night, nor the following night.

Mohammed was very embarrassed and confused. Finally Allah spoke to him and gave him the answer, then said: "But the next time you promise to give an answer 'tomorrow,' say '*Inshallah*.'" (p. 53)

Tumpane's clear, matter-of-fact writing saves his memoir from the annoying insider attitude that typify many expat accounts. Tumpane aims to entertain us, not impress us. Yet impress us he does, through unselfconscious enthusiasm, irony, and just the right amount of cultural and linguistic explanation to serve his stories, not his ego.

Some readers may find Tumpane's stories lacking in depth. To be fair, Tumpane is more interested in describing his adventures than in self-reflection, cultural analysis, or the lives of others (a wise move: most of his fellow expats spend their time partying or whining). But with a few Turks and one Greek (members of a submerged population, to use Frank O'Connor's term), Tumpane goes beneath the surface of their daily lives to show us who they really are.

Though a sophisticate with a degree from Yale (George H. W. Bush was a classmate) and a former assistant professor of speech and drama at the University of Notre Dame, Tumpane understands what it means to live a stifled life. His understanding may come, in

part, from the fact that he was a closeted gay man. His chapters on his handyman Nuri, his Greek housemaid Jemileh (Jimmy), and the nightclub manager Selma are haunting; hope for the future is a concept alien to these wage-laborers. In these sketches and others, Tumpane reveals the great divide between many of the natives and the happy-go-lucky, devil-may-care international workers they serve. The story “Selma” is especially poignant in this regard.

The strongest stories in *Scotch* feature Tumpane’s experiences with locals. For this reason, four anecdotes from the original edition that are not about locals have been omitted. In their place are the following previously unpublished pieces: “A Letter to Readers”; chapter 1 of *Sand and Siddiqi* (John’s unfinished book about Saudi Arabia); “Dear John, You Send Me Plenty Of ” (poem by John’s sister, Mary Jean); “The Baby Bottle”; and “The Telephone Operator.” These new selections appear in the Appendix.

As frank a writer as he is, Tumpane remains something of an enigma. One suspects that his decision to move to Turkey was rooted in something more than just a desire to explore its ruins, collect artifacts, and enjoy a robust nightlife. But his descriptions of his exploits are so colorful that we don’t mind his keeping something to himself. Happily, Tumpane lets down his guard in his larky interactions with coworkers, friends, and strangers. His exchange with a businessman in Van, in eastern Turkey, is an example:

While I was waiting for my room, a well-dressed, darkly handsome man of 30 sat down in the chair beside me and struck up a conversation in Turkish.

“Welcome,” he said. “Thank you.”

“Are you German?”

I laughed because I had been asked this many times.

Apparently the Germans were the first tourists in these out-of-the-way places. They have a reputation of being at least two years ahead of any other tourists.

“No, I am an American.” “Where are you from?”

“From Diyarbakir. I came today.”

“No, no, no. *I* am from Diyarbakir. I was born there. I came on Tuesday. I am a hat salesman. But *you*, do you come from New York? Chee-cago? Texas?”

“Well, I’m originally from Massachusetts.” “Oh, a Red Indian,” he said matter-of-factly.

“No, there are no more Red Indians in Massachusetts.”

“Why did you come to Van?” “To see it.”

“Are you looking for oil?” “No.”

“Gold?”

“No.”

“The Americans never come here unless they are looking for oil, or gold. Are you a spy?”

“No, no,” I laughed. “I just came to see Van. To take pictures.” I displayed the Polaroid camera hanging around my neck. “I’m just a tourist.” It was obvious that he didn’t believe me, but he bowed politely and welcomed me again.

“By the way,” I said, “I’ve been sitting here 20 minutes waiting for a room, and I’m getting slightly tired of it. That boy there asked me

to wait only one minute, but it's been almost half an hour. Are there any other hotels in Van?"

"Oh yes, there are many. Now let's see—" And he started to count them off on his fingers. "There's the Chichek Palas (Flower Hotel), Temiz Palas (Clean), Bacheh Palas (Garden), Gul Palas (Rose), and the Emperiyal Palas (Imperial). But this is the only one without bugs."

I decided to wait. (pp. 62–3)

This conversation is just one of many pitch-perfect exchanges in *Scotch*. By turns deadpan, outrageous, comic, and melancholic, they reflect Tumpane's skill as a writer.

As for the alcohol in Tumpane's memoir—well, Johnnie Walker is practically a minor character. But *Scotch and Holy Water* does not lack authorial discipline; it is terse and deceptively astute. Tumpane's experiences feel deeply authentic: impossible to fake, impossible to invent.

And the holy water? It makes its appearance halfway through the book. History, Christianity, and Johnnie Walker come together in fine fashion.

Tumpane left Turkey in 1968 to work in Saudi Arabia and Iran. In 1976 he returned to the U.S., settling in Walnut Creek, California, to be near his sister Mary Jean. It was in Walnut Creek that he wrote *Scotch and Holy Water*. Mary Jean, an accomplished artist, drew pen-and-ink maps for the frontispiece and for each of the book's three parts.

Tumpane pitched his memoir to scores of publishers but had no success. In a letter to *San Francisco Chronicle* Book Editor Patricia Holt, he wrote that he had received "201 rejection slips—one more

than Ernest Hemingway before he got his first acceptance—and why I named my press after St. Giles [patron saint of beggars].”

St. Giles Press published *Scotch* in November 1981. Tumpane promoted the book through the Turkish American Association of California and by writing autobiographical essays for various publications. A few newspapers in the U.S. gave *Scotch* good reviews. On August 8, 1982, the *San Francisco Chronicle* published a glowing endorsement. Reviewer Joe Cottonwood wrote, “This book is a delight, a surprise, a rare find...I recommend it.”

Readers who had spent time in Turkey wrote to Tumpane to tell him how much they enjoyed his book and how well he captured 1960s expat life. Tumpane personally responded to many of his correspondents and included a form letter in which he explained how he wrote *Scotch*:

Many people have asked me if I kept a diary while I was in Turkey. No. But when I returned to the States 20 years later, the Polaroid pictures gave me total recall. I had written my parents at least once a week while I was gone, and they saved all the pictures I had sent them. I was glad I had included on the backs of the pictures the dates, names, and historical information which was fresh in my mind at the time, such as “This is where Caesar stood when he said, ‘*Veni, vidi, vici*’ after he defeated the king of Pontus in 47 B.C. —on this very same hill 240 miles east of Ankara” or “This is the first known Christian church built in a cave near Antakya (Antioch), just after a visit by St. Peter in 42 A.D. Antioch was the largest city in the world in those days.” (pp. 384–5)

Tumpane began work on a second set of memoirs about Turkey as well as a book about his tenure in Saudi Arabia (1968–1974). An obsessive writer, he churned out articles, short stories, and reviews

of books. He sent packets of his writings to family and friends. Always the extrovert, Tumpane was the life of parties. His nephew Keith Lachowicz observed, “John loved storytelling, performing. He thrived on holding court and being funny, outrageous, off-color. His being a speech and drama professor was a big contributor to his storytelling acumen. His storytelling sessions were like mini performances.”

It is our good fortune that TESL-EJ Publications, in conjunction with the Tumpane family, has brought John Tumpane’s memoir back into print. In an era where many expat books seem like watered-down Tiki drinks, *Scotch and Holy Water* is 100-proof liquid gold. It is genuine and extravagant, a work to treasure.

Epilogue: Putting It All Together

One challenge in preparing a handbook on writing is believing it even needs to be done. Thousands of books on writing exist in English. How many students of writing actually seek them out?

Even authors of books on writing do not always follow their own advice. Gary Provost, author of the astute *100 Ways To Improve Your Writing*, says:

Writing is art, not science, and when I finish a piece of writing, I do not review every single one of my tips. I ask: Have I communicated well? Have I pleased my readers? Have I given them something that is a joy to read? Have

I entertained them, informed them, persuaded them, and made my thoughts clear to them? Have I given them what they wanted?
(p. 159)

Evaluating your own writing may be the hardest thing you will do. Even the most redoubtable writers need help in improving their

prose. The astronomer Carl Sagan benefited from his wife (and editor) Ann Druyan. The historian Robert V. Remini gained valuable perspective from his editor Harold M. Hyman. Erwin Glikes judiciously edited the controversial work of psychologist Richard J. Herrnstein and political scientist Charles Murray.

These distinguished authors produced better writing thanks to their extraordinary editors. Surely we would all benefit from such careful readers. How lucky some of us are to have them.

References

- Ambrose has done it before. (January 7, 2002). www.forbes.com.
- Bagehot, W. (1873). *Lombard street: A description of the money market*. Richard Clay & Sons, Ltd.
- Balzac, H. de. (1835). *Le père Goriot*. Éditions Werdet.
- Beard, C. A. (1946). *An economic interpretation of the constitution of the United States*. Macmillan.
- Braudel, F. (1979). *The structures of everyday life: The limits of the possible* (vol. 1). University of California Press.
- Brooks, B. S. & Pinson, J. L. (1993). *Working with words* (2nd ed.). Bedford/St. Martin's.
- Brown, R. W. (1915). *How the French boy learns to write*. The National Council of Teachers of English. 1963.
- Carnegie, A. (1889). Thrift as a duty. In W. Elkins (Ed.), *Literary reflections* (pp. 272–5). McGraw Hill. 1982.

Chase, S. (1956). *Guides to straight thinking*. Harper & Row.

Copeland, M. (1969). *The game of nations*. Simon and Schuster.
Ford's theatre flunks O'Reilly's Lincoln book. (November 11, 2011).
www.salon.com.

Garner, B. A. (1998). *A dictionary of modern American usage*. Oxford.
Ginsberg, A. (1974). In G. Ball (Ed.), *Allen verbatim: Lectures on poetry, politics, consciousness*. McGraw-Hill.

Gowers, E. (1956). *The complete plain words* (3rd ed.). Campfield.

Graeber, D. (2011). *Debt: The first 5,000 years*. Melville House.

Griffin, G. E. (2010). *The creature from Jekyll island*. American Media.
Halpern, M. (2017). *Language and human nature*. Routledge.

Hollis, C. (1937). *The Two Nations*. George Routledge and Sons, Ltd.

Horton, R. (April 2015). Offline: What is medicine's 5 sigma? *The Lancet*.

Lasswell, H. (1938). *Propaganda technique in the world war*. P. Smith.

Leonard, C. (2021). How Nov. 2, 2010 made the rich so much richer.
www.time.com.

Lewis, B. (2000). *A middle east mosaic*. Modern Library.
Magliozzi, T. and R. (2000). *In our humble opinion*. Berkley.
Menand, L. (2022). *The fed unbound*. Columbia Global Reports. More controversy for Stephen Ambrose. (January. 9, 2002). www.forbes.com.

Moynihan, M. C. (July 30, 2012). Jonah Lehrer's deceptions.
www.tabletmag.org.

Orwell, G. (1933). *Down and out in Paris and London*. Harcourt Brace Jovanovich, Inc. 1961.

Orwell, G. (1946). How the poor die. *The collected essays, journalism and letters of George Orwell* (vol. 4). Harcourt, Brace & World. 1968.

Orwell, G. (1946) Politics and the English language. *The collected essays, journalism and letters of George Orwell* (vol. 4). Harcourt, Brace & World. 1968.

Paul, R. (2009). *End the fed*. Grand Central Publishing.

Petty, W. (1682). Quantulumcumque concerning money. (n.p.)

Poteshman, A. (July 2006). Unusual option market activity and the terrorist attacks of September 11, 2001. *The Journal of Business*, V. 79; 4, pp. 1703–1726.

Provost, G. (2019). *100 ways to improve your writing*. Berkley. Report of the departmental committee on the teaching of English in England. (1921). H. M. Stationery.

Sternstein, J. (May 20, 2002). ‘Pulped’ fiction: Michael Bellesiles and his yellow note pads. History News Network.

Thornton, H. (1802). *An enquiry into the nature and effects of the paper credit of Great Britain*. T. Cadell and W. Davies.

Tumpane, J. (1981). *Scotch and holy water*. TESL-EJ Publications. 2nd ed., 2019.

Voorhis, J. (1943). *Out of debt, out of danger*. Devin-Adair. 1991.

Wechsler, L. (1999). *Boggs: A comedy of values*. Univ. of Chicago Press.

Notes

Preface: Why Research-Based Writing?

1. <https://library.csuchico.edu/sites/default/files/craap-test.pdf>

1. Have Something to Say

1. AI chatbots are computer programs designed to simulate conversation with human users, typically through text or speech interfaces. These chatbots utilize artificial intelligence (AI) techniques, such as natural language processing (NLP) and machine learning, to understand user input and generate appropriate responses.
2. “Opportunity cost” is the potential benefit that an individual forfeits when choosing one alternative over another.

2. Do Preliminary Research

1. The 11th edition of the *Encyclopedia Britannica* (1910–11) is renowned for its articles written by prominent scholars and experts of the time.

5. Know the Value of Primary and Scholarly Research, and Data Analysis

1. Poteshman, A. (July 2006). Unusual option market activity and the terrorist attacks of September 11, 2001. *The Journal of Business*, V. 79; 4, pp. 1703–1726.
2. Anna Schwartz was Milton Friedman’s co-author on his history of monetary policy in the U.S. Paul Krugman has called Schwartz “one of the world’s greatest monetary scholars.”
3. The relationship of knowledge to boundaries of thought is obvious but not generally stressed in writing classes. A nameless British writer put it this way: “What a man cannot state, he does not perfectly know, and conversely the inability to put his thoughts into words sets a boundary to his thought...” Cited in Gowers, E. (1956). *The Complete Plain Words* (3rd ed.), p. 5.

7. Choose a Paragraph Structure

1. ChatGPT is a natural language processing model developed by OpenAI. It contributed to the information presented in bullets in this chapter.

9. Be Honest

1. Orwell, G. (1933). *Down and Out in Paris and London*. 1961, p. 18.
2. Orwell, G. (1946). How the poor die. *The Collected Essays, Journalism and Letters of George Orwell* (vol. 4). 1968, p. 232.
3. 1. www.sfgate.com, Oct. 4, 2003.
4. www.nytimes.com, Sept. 4, 1994.
5. www.nytimes.com, April 25, 2006.
6. www.newyorker.com, Feb. 5, 2012.

11. Use the Preferred Terms of the Discourse Community

1. Some writers, such as Joseph Epstein, Charles Murray, and Jordan Peterson, use terms (and express views) not generally accepted in their disciplines. They have suffered consequences for doing so.

12. Say What You Have to Say as Clearly as Possible

1. Orwell, G. (1946). Politics and the English language. *The Collected Essays, Journalism and Letters of George Orwell* (vol. 4). 1968, p. 135.
2. Gowers, E. (1956). *The Complete Plain Words* (3rd ed.), p. 3. Note: Orwell and Arnold's exhortations are valuable enough, though they omit considerations of audience and situation. The sociologist Harold Lasswell addressed this point in a question: "*Who says what to whom with what effect?*" Only knowledge of your discourse community can inform you on how to answer this question for your own work.

17. Choose the Shorter, More Common Synonym

1. Halpern, M. (2017). *Language and Human Nature*. Routledge. Note: While Roget's view is widely accepted by linguists and lexicographers, there are often close synonyms with overlapping meanings. Depending on the audience and situation, using a less precise word for a given term may be the best choice.

Notes

21. Use Parallel Words

1. Correlative conjunctions (or double conjunctions) are pairs of words that work together to join words, phrases, or clauses with similar grammatical structures. “Both...and” is a common correlative conjunction pair, indicating that two elements are being considered together.

22. Check Your Quotations and Attributions

1. Moynihan, M. C. (July 30, 2012). Jonah Lehrer’s deceptions. tabletmag.org.
2. More controversy for Stephen Ambrose. (Jan. 9, 2002). www.forbes.com.
3. Ambrose has done it before. (Jan. 7, 2002). www.forbes.com.
4. Sternstein, J. (May 20, 2002). ‘Pulped’ fiction: Michael Bellesiles and his yellow note pads. www.historynewsnetwork.org.
5. Elliott, J. (November 11, 2011). Ford’s theatre flunks O’Reilly’s Lincoln book. www.salon.com.

25. Get Second Opinions (Personal, Professional, AI Chatbot, Etc.)

1. It must be noted that one or more of your peers may ignore your request to review your paper, or beg off from doing so. If a peer agrees, he or she may give your paper only a cursory review. Such reactions are not uncommon in academia.

Essays

1. Graeber (2011) questions whether barter was even practiced as we know it today.
2. Quoted by Christopher Hollis in *The Two Nations* (1937), p. 30.
3. Most central banks are owned by governments. The U.S., with its Federal Reserve System, is one of the few exceptions; it has elements of private and public ownership.

About the Author

Scott Alkire teaches academic and professional writing at San Jose State University and San Jose City College. He serves as managing editor of the World Languages Translation Club, a group of SJSU students and faculty who translate noteworthy books that have never appeared in English.

TESL-EJ Publications of Berkeley and Kyoto has published three of the club's translations, all by the late Dr. Kato Lomb: *Polyglot: How I Learn Languages*, *Harmony of Babel: Profiles of Famous Polyglots of Europe*, and *With Languages in Mind: Musings of a Polyglot*. Kato Lomb has been called "possibly the most accomplished polyglot in the world" by linguist Stephen Krashen. The club also edited and published a new edition of John D. Tumpane's expat memoir, *Scotch and Holy Water* (TESL-EJ, 2019). The book features three previously unpublished stories, two set in Turkey and one in Saudi Arabia.

Also by Scott Alkire

Polyglot: How I Learn Languages, Second Edition

Kató Lomb. Translated by Ádám Szegi and Kornelia DeKorne, Edited by Scott Alkire.

With Languages in Mind: Musings of a Polyglot

Kató Lomb. Translated by Ádám Szegi, Edited by Scott Alkire.

Harmony of Babel: Profiles of Famous Polyglots, by Kató Lomb, Edited by Scott Alkire.

Scotch and Holy Water

John D. Tumpane. Edited by Scott Alkire.

All books are available at tesl-ej.org/wordpress/books

