Word Bytes
Word Bytes

*Writing in the Information Society*

Carolyne Lee
Nadine Cresswell-Myatt, Paul Dawson, Adam Deverell, Scott Drummond, Jenny Lee, Winnie Salamon and Lucinda Strahan
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Contributors

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Winnie Salamon is a novelist and journalist. She has written for a wide range of magazines, tabloids, broadsheets and education texts. She is currently completing a PhD about the experience of former reality television participants. She also teaches Professional Writing at the University of Melbourne.

Lucinda Strahan is a writer, editor, arts journalist and media academic. She has reported and reviewed arts and culture for publications such as The Age, ABC online, Broadsheet, RealTime, Inpress, The Big Issue and Harpers Bazaar as well as for community radio 3RRR FM and 3PBS FM. She holds a Masters degree in Journalism and lectures in communication at RMIT University. She also writes fiction and has been part of creative collaborations with contemporary artists and interactive designers.
Writers of Work in the Appendices

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Introduction
Wordlings in a Web 2.0 World
Carolyne Lee

Being bodies that learn language
thereby becoming wordlings
humans are
the symbol-making, symbol-using, symbol-misusing
animal
inventor of the negative
separated from our natural condition
by instruments of our own making
goaded by the spirit of hierarchy
acquiring foreknowledge of death
and rotten with perfection¹

Kenneth Burke's definition of what it is to be human²

Wordlings and ‘Word Bytes’
I have long loved this definition of us as ‘wordlings’. Written around
the middle of last century, Burke’s view is as true today as ever. It’s
significant that he took care to include in his definition our ‘symbol-
making’ and ‘symbol-using’ capacity, ‘allowing him to encompass
a wider range of phenomena than the purely linguistic … systems
of dance, music, painting ... [even] symbol systems not usually subsumed under the general rubric of the humanities ... mathematics, computer programming, chemistry ... Burke purposely chose the widest possible term, to include the widest range of human phenomena."

It is with the symbol system of words, as the title Word Bytes suggests, that this book is concerned. Principally, it is about the two ways in which humans use this system—writing and reading—and how best to fashion the former to make the latter experience as rewarding as it can be. For although we now live in what is irrevocably an information society, where ‘information technologies based upon computer logic have networked our world’, the written word has defied all predictions and refuses to become obsolete, even in a world which now seems to many to privilege the image. We continue to need words, and always will, because as Don Watson observes, ‘Pictures rule: but words define, explain, express, direct, hold together our thoughts and what we know. They lead us into new ideas and back to older ones. In the beginning was the Word.’

Following Watson, it is my view that the written word—whether in print or pixels—is still of great importance to us ‘wordlings’, despite many of the contexts in which it is offered and received not having existed before, or having changed in radical ways in the last few years. The major change in our lifetimes—the internet—has caused the proliferation of information on all facets of human existence—yet much of this is still disseminated via the medium of words. As a teacher in the Humanities, I might wish that much of this dissemination was more eloquent, or more logically argued; but as a citizen of a democratic public sphere, I applaud the ever-expanding range of voices that now see the light of (pixilated) print. Of course, making it into print is one thing, gaining readers for our words is quite another. Increasingly, words that want to be noticed, I argue, need to be ‘word bytes’.

‘Word bytes’ is a term I have coined to describe a certain type of writing, or rather to describe a quality possessed by writing that can get itself noticed, read and retained by readers in contexts of information overload. The very phrase ‘word byte’ is a term that has a meaning which could only be possible in our current world—the information society. Most of us are now familiar with the term ‘sound
bite’—signifying a short pithy phrase or sentence that is attention-grabbing and will stay in people's minds, competing successfully against the million-and-one other pieces of information that now bombard us during most of our waking lives. ‘Sound bite’ is also often written as ‘sound byte’, a spelling that in turn evokes one of the major elements of our lives now—the data that transmit information to our computers, made up of zeros and ones in sequences. These sequences are usually counted in groups of eight, called bytes. The word ‘byte’ is short for binary digit eight. As I type these words on my keyboard, each stroke requires one byte of information (that is, eight bits). A three-letter word like ‘bit’ requires three bytes of information. So the term ‘word byte’ is a play on words since, in one sense, all words we write onscreen are ‘word bytes’ because in composing them we are required to transmit multiple bytes, even if we don’t realise that’s what we’re doing.

Those of us who write because we need to or want to—for our education, for pleasure or creative expression, or for our work (and most occupations now require writing of one sort or another)—hope that our words will stand out from the vast array of competition. We hope that when readers’ eyes scan over the material we have written, it will function in much the same way as ‘sound bytes’ do. This means it needs to be first noticed and to demand attention. Then it needs to be retained in the reader’s mind, amid the plethora of other stimuli. If it can do this, it will be functioning as a ‘word byte’.

It is true, however, that some ‘word bytes’, as with ‘sound bites’, can be catchy simply because they are glib, not because they tell us anything new, or are crafted in subtle and interesting ways. But these will not stay in our minds, they will slip through in seconds, taking little foothold. The ‘word byte’ quality for which I am arguing is one where a great deal of meaning is condensed into few words, or at least a certain economical structure of expression. Writing that takes fewer words to express its meaning is not necessarily inferior. Poetry is a case in point. Poems are language often distilled to an essence, and are not considered inferior to longer works. Nor do they automatically require a simpler vocabulary, although a simpler vocabulary in itself does not have to mean a simpler message. Think of William Carlos Williams’ famous poem, ‘The Red Wheelbarrow’: ‘so much depends/upon/a red wheel/barrow …’6
Depending on the physical situation in which our words are read, they often have to compete with multiple and multiplying items of information from many other media. The television or radio might be playing in the same room as the reader, or she might have iPod earphones in her ears. If she is reading the words on the computer screen, at any time an alert might sound, or a ‘bubble’ might briefly appear in the bottom of her screen, or both at once, informing her that a new email has arrived. Her mobile phone could buzz or ring, and even the old-fashioned landline could join in the cacophony. This is no exaggeration, it happens to me on a regular basis. The other day it happened while I was talking to someone in a different state, using Skype (internet telephony), complete with headphones, and webcam.

So not only do our words have to garner attention in the first place, they have to retain a foothold in the minds of readers when so much else is clamouring for their attention. This is a reality of life in the information society. We can lament it. We can recognise that it brings as many problems as rewards. We can even dub it the too-much-information society. But it is not going to go away. It is likely that in future we are going to become even more overloaded with information. And as every society brings forth certain specific skills for survival and success within it, the skills of gaining access to information, judgment and evaluation of it, management and production of it, are the key skills in the information society. Even those people who produce words only for paper media still need to do their writing in the context of the surfeit of information and communication with which their words must now compete for attention.

As Scott Drummond says in his chapter on web-writing in this volume, ‘we live in a Web 2.0 world.’ What is meant by this is the rapid and ongoing development of technologies that have taken the web to a whole new level of interactivity, enabling users to respond to content on the web, and then to create their own, or to present the words of others in a new format.

Let’s take a look at some of these new forms of communication made possible by the information technologies in general, including Web 2.0: email, chat and chatrooms, newsgroups, special interest groups (on, for example, photography), wikis, social network sites, blogs, discussion forums, internet telephony and text-messaging via mobile phones. Most of these communication forms involve the use
of language forms that already existed before the internet—in many cases the language of oral and even colloquial expression. While special abbreviations may be used, and even certain specific in-group vocabulary, as well as emoticons (for example :(-) or 😊), most language on the internet simply mirrors the type of in-group language that occurs in face-to-face groups (the exception to this might be the conventions of mobile phone text messaging abbreviations). In addition, many of these media groups display language use that is every bit as stylish, rich and compelling as writing previously valorised for these qualities in books and magazines. It is the best of this writing that can qualify for the term ‘word byte’.

**From User-generated Words to Shakespeare’s Sonnets**

Below is an example of text that functions as a ‘word byte’ in the form of an extracted piece of user-generated writing from a communal photography site called Trekearth (www.trekearth.com), which has as its mission, ‘Learning about the world through photography’; to this site, members can upload their photos, as well as explain the technical aspects of the photography, give a brief description of the depicted scene, and they may if they wish comment on the photographic qualities of others’ photos. Words or phrases from within pieces of text can be hyperlinked from one photograph to another, or to external sites—one of the best features of text on the web. The following description accompanies a photograph of a very elderly man and woman on a street near a market, taken in June 2008 in the small town of Domme in the south west of France.

I first saw them while walking around the old covered market hall in Domme. There was something about their manner and earnest gesticulations which suggested they were not a married couple; their conversation seemed too animated, too urgent, somehow, and sure enough the gentleman eventually went on his way. I noticed the strong colour of the motorbike, echoed by the flowers in front of the window and beside the man, and decided to include these elements in the picture. The corner of the market wall on the right seemed also to give a suggestion of my eavesdropping on them, which is, I suppose, exactly what
I was doing as I followed them for several minutes with my camera.\textsuperscript{8}

This is a good example of a word byte. The verbal descriptions of the photographs on this website have to compete against the frequently compelling photograph for the reader’s attention, and not all will win. I chose this excerpt because it starts in the middle of the action, a device—called \textit{in medias res}\textemdash said to have been recommended by the first century BC Roman poet Horace, and always a good method for gaining attention. The prose’s informal, almost confiding, yet low-key tone gives a clear sense of a certain identity behind the words, and is an example of what Scott Drummond refers to as ‘personality-infused communication’, an essential feature of successful web 2.0 writing. The vivid visual descriptions in this piece, too, and the interesting word choices (earnest gesticulations, animated, urgent, echoed, eavesdropping and so on), all add to its appeal.

As well as such purpose-written material, we also have access to excerpts through to entire oeuvres of the world’s most acclaimed writers. To find a copy of Kenneth Burke’s poem, with which I began this chapter, I typed ‘Kenneth Burke’ and ‘wordlings’ into the Google search engine; up came the results pages, and two clicks of the mouse took me directly to the poem, all achieved in under 10 seconds. Similarly, I typed into Google—Shakespeare + complete + works, and clicked on one of the links that appeared, and found myself at the Open Source Shakespeare Site (www.opensourceshakespeare.org).

This site was constructed by an American marine reservist Eric M. Johnson, while serving in Kuwait in 2003, and later formed the basis of his MA in English at George Mason University. Johnson says his site ‘attempts to be the best free Web site containing Shakespeare’s complete works. It is intended for scholars, thespians and Shakespeare lovers of every kind. OSS includes the 1864 Globe Edition of the complete works, which was the definitive single-volume Shakespeare edition for over a half-century.’ Between typing the word Shakespeare and reading Sonnet IV, which contains one of my all-time beloved ‘word byte’ lines—‘nature taketh nothing but doth lend’—around 10 seconds elapsed.

It took me a little longer—maybe three minutes—to find in electronic form a long-remembered poem, ‘Living in Sin’, from my
favourite poet, Adrienne Rich, to read it, and then to copy and paste a few lines of it below:

She had thought the studio would keep itself:
no dust upon the furniture of love.
Half heresy, to wish the taps less vocal,
the panes relieved of grime …

I have gone to some lengths here, although without needing to expend much time on it, to show examples of beautiful, target-hitting language—one of the main qualities of a ‘word byte’—all taken from the web. True, two of these excerpts existed before the web’s invention, but one (from the Trekearth website) was created especially for it, and was in fact typed directly into a box on the website, as is much language that is put on the web by its users, who are often dubbed ‘prosumers’ because they are both consumers and producers of web content. So while it’s true that the internet’s stock-in-trade is language, because of the enormous variety of language that we can find there, the internet is not a homogenous linguistic medium, and the term Netspeak (following George Orwell’s ‘Newspeak’) that we see bandied about, is not a very useful term. If we are talking about all internet language, then we would have to include the semi-literate or even ignorant ravings of some personal blogs, as well as the digital versions of Shakespeare. I don’t believe a term exists that can meaningfully encompass these two extremes as there are many different genres of internet language, each specific to its own discourse community, as there are genres of pre-internet origin.

**Netlingo as ‘Word Bytes’?**

We could, however, use the terms netspeak or netlingo to refer to words that have come uniquely from internet or information technology usage, and have now entered common parlance. The word ‘Photoshop’, for example, while denoting a type of computer software for manipulating images, has recently been included as a draft entry in the Oxford English Dictionary. But even earlier I came across ‘Photoshop’ being used as a verb in the following sentence (in an article discussing Photoshopped images on newsgroup websites specifically constructed to express hatred for Osama bin Laden):
Newsgroups probably helped a lot of people deal with the stress of September 11. But unless we want to add a whole host of other dreadful dates to our “perpetual calendar of human anxiety” (Focillon), then we should spend less time demonising the enemy, and more time Photoshopping a future we can all actually live in.\textsuperscript{13}

It’s interesting how the authors of this sentence actually used Photoshop in a metaphoric, or connotive sense, whereas the draft dictionary definition, or denotation is: ‘To edit, manipulate, or alter (a photographic image) digitally using computer image-editing software.’\textsuperscript{14} Its metaphoric form in that sentence, in which I first encountered it, is a good example of a ‘sound byte’, something that has remained in my memory for four years!

Google is another word that has entered the OED as a draft entry, in June 2008, ‘in recognition of our increasing reliance on the popular search engine for ferreting out information about people, places and things.’ As Scanlon further notes, these computer terms have been transformed by common usage from noun to verb, something that not many technical nouns have done, perhaps only those that ‘introduce unprecedented cultural changes’. Of course, the phenomenon of proper noun-to-verb is not new. I’m reminded of the brand name of a popular vacuum cleaner that first became available in the fifties—Hoover; it was common to hear women (yes, in those dark ages, it was mostly women) speaking of ‘hoovering’ their carpets. Perhaps such machines also represented an ‘unprecedented change’ from earlier, more laborious methods of cleaning floors, and the word eventually appeared in the OED.

There are other new words spawned by the information and communication technologies, or which are used by certain specialist online communities—be it in denotive or connotive forms—such as hardwired, B2B, javascript, jpegs, Mac, hardwired, mainframe, hacker, portal and so on. A staggeringly comprehensive list, including abbreviations used in text messaging, can be found at www.netlingo.com. Many netlingo terms can be used in ways that function as ‘word bytes’. Text messages, too, can be ‘word bytes’ of quite a different order from both specialist computer language, and the more common forms of written language. While there’s a view that the abbreviation...
involved in texting is impoverishing the language, and lowering literacy skills, this is not borne out by the latest research from Coventry University in Britain. On the contrary, texting improves literacy because ‘before you can write and play with abbreviated forms, you need to have a sense of how the sounds of your language relate to the letters.’

As David Crystal argues, wordplay involving abbreviation is not a new phenomenon. He cites the example of a well-known riddle from at least the first half of the twentieth century: YY U R YY U B I C U R YY 4 ME (= ‘Too wise you are, too wise you be ...’). From much earlier, 1711 in fact, English writer Joseph Addison complained about how some words were being ‘miserably curtailed’, such as ‘pos’ (for positive) and ‘incog’ (for incognito); and ‘cos’ has been in the OED from 1828, and ‘wot’ from 1829.

Earlier, I mentioned the concentration or distillation of meaning into fewer words, the main quality of a ‘word byte’. Haiku, for example, is an extremely condensed form. Drawing on this idea, and no doubt intending to demonstrate that texting is not restricted to inane exchanges, for World Poetry Day in 2007, a UK mobile company ran a competition to find the best romantic poem in SMS. Entrants could use abbreviated and non-abbreviated words. The winning entry, by Ben Ziman Bright, was as follows:

The wet rustle of rain
can dampen today. Your text
buoys me above oil-rainbow puddles
like a paper boat, so that even
soaked to the skin
I am grinning.

But in a strange commonality with eras prior to mass literacy, much communication in the information society now relies on visual media, surpassing text-based communication of any kind. Whether we consider modern hardcopy mass media, or the world wide web, it can often seem that pictures dominate, to the extent that words may even be seen as ‘parasitic on the image’. But only in certain communication situations, I would argue. The Trekearth site, for example, is more about images than words, so it is unlikely that all
of the descriptions of the photographs are read. With online newspapers, even those of us who are avid readers would view far more images illustrating articles than we would read the actual articles. There is evidence that when we do read on the web, it is often done in quite a different fashion from how we read books or other hardcopy (see Chapter 13 on web writing for more on this). But the web would be much less interesting and informative without words. We are all wordlings, albeit in differing degrees, and our world’s conversion to an information society has not changed this.

**Deathly Words?**
Watson believes, however, that words are in danger. This is the central thesis of his book *Death Sentence*:

> While English spreads across the globe, the language itself is shrinking. Vast numbers of new words enter it every year, but our children’s and leader’s vocabularies are getting smaller. Latin and Greek have been squeezed out of most journalists’ English and ‘obscure’ words are forbidden unless they qualify as economic or business jargon. You write for your audience and your audience knows fewer words than it used to and hasn’t time to look up unfamiliar ones. The language of politics is tuned to the same audience and uses the same media to reach it, so it too diminishes year by year. … Like a public company, the public language is being trimmed of excess and subtlety.19

Watson terms this resultant, impoverished form of English ‘managerial language’ and argues that it ‘may well be to the information age what the machine and the assembly line were to the industrial’,20 in other words, a form of monotonous enslavement. He calls the worst examples of this type of language ‘weasel words’. Said to have originated in nineteenth century American politics, weasel words suck the meaning out of sentences in the way that ‘a weasel sucks an egg dry, leaving its shell intact.’21 President Roosevelt apparently used it to describe President Wilson’s use of the term ‘universal voluntary training’ for ‘conscription’. The concept of ‘weasel words’ has been used, too, by media critics, notably Stuart Hall and Norman
Fairclough. For example, Fairclough argues that the British Labour Party’s change of name to New Labour ‘wasn’t just reflecting a shift in political ideology, it was manipulating language to control public perception …’\textsuperscript{22} He sees this as a new type of centralised control modelled on business, a form of control that involves language, especially the selection of ‘particular wordings, that will be most effective in achieving consent.’\textsuperscript{23}

Similarly Watson argues that this ‘managerial language’, emanates from business and from politicians, before being reproduced in all forms of the media.

This reproduction is of course inevitable because the media, including the web, ‘offer a home to all linguistic styles within a language …’\textsuperscript{24} And within this home we will find ‘word bytes’ as well as their opposite, ‘weasel’ words—examples of language that has had all meaning sucked out of it. As Crystal makes clear, there are many varieties of English in use, each governed by its own set of conventions; for example, legal English, religious English, academic English, in addition to the managerial English described by Watson. We certainly do encounter far too much badly crafted language in many media, but I’m not sure that the causes for it can all be attributed to the information society. I grant, however, that one might be tempted to think otherwise after reading some unmoderated, free-for-all, or even personal, weblog, full of badly spelt inchoate ravings. Then again, why should such material be denied an existence, providing its content does not contravene our society’s laws? No one is forced to read anything. If the content of any media does not seem useful to us, we can move on, selecting other material that is. The long centuries of elite gatekeeping, when only those with power or resources controlled what material was granted the oxygen of exposure, are thankfully over. And for every narcissistic rave couched in idiosyncratic spelling, or vast tract of managerial ‘weasel’ writing, there is available carefully styled, well-researched, reasoned discussion on the vital issues of the day, often by unknown writers, which could not have been available to a mass audience in any other era.

Significantly, as Watson demonstrates, the most deathly examples of English writing are produced by at least some of those with the most power and resources in society. Emanating first from business, and seeping into politics, the media, and ‘all kinds of
institutions’, it is, Watson asserts, the idiom of managerialism that has now become our public language. But has it really? As a media researcher, I immediately want to do some empirical testing to see if he’s correct; so I go to the homepage of *The Age* newspaper online and click on the link ‘Today’s coverage’. I then click on two stories at random, and copy and save the first ten lines of each, to examine them in detail.

The first article, ‘US Climate Debate May Be Sidelined’ begins with the lines:

An inconvenient truth, rarely mentioned in Australia’s climate change debate, is that the effectiveness of any state-led response to the greatest challenge of the 21st century rests in the hands of two countries: America and China. Unless the two powers, which together contribute almost half the world’s carbon dioxide emissions, can reach agreement on obligations to slash their emissions, there is scant hope that the international community will be able to stabilise atmospheric concentrations of greenhouse gases at a level that will avert disastrous consequences.

In recent statements of their respective China policies, both US presidential candidates have expressed a welcome willingness to work with China to cut emissions. However, the obstacles to achieving such agreement are large.

The author, Fergus Green, has begun his article with a double wordplay. The first is to echo the title of a recent and famous documentary about climate, *An Inconvenient Truth*, made by Al Gore. This is a most appropriate echoing, given the similarity of the subject matter. The second wordplay involves a much-emulated syntactic mirroring of an opening sentence first made famous by Jane Austen, which begins ‘It is a truth universally acknowledged …’ from her novel *Pride and Prejudice*. Although the tone of the article is one of objective ‘hard news’, Green employs strong verbs (slash, stabilise, avert) where he can, as well as the interesting adjective ‘scant’; there is also the alliteration of ‘welcome willingness’. All in all, just in these eleven lines, I see an attention to detail that makes this piece of prose...
full of ‘word bytes’ with the capacity to capture attention. The argument has a strong chance of remaining in the reader’s mind for some time, mainly thanks to the wordplays at the start. This is not prose ‘trimmed of excess and subtlety’, and neither is it the language of managerialism.

We find a very different style, however, in the opening lines of the second of the three stories, “New Generation Housing” Can Open Doors for the Marginalised:

A key element in any strategy to alleviate homelessness must be an increase in the supply of safe and affordable housing. While federal and state governments are working to improve life for the marginalised—a federal white paper is due in October and a national affordable housing agreement is expected later in the year—there must be wider acknowledgement that it has become almost impossible for people who are homeless to find safe and affordable accommodation.

Agencies whose mission is to help the poor often have no alternative but to place people in private rooming houses where a couple must pay up to $370 a week for a room no bigger than a standard lounge room—with no toilet, no kitchen and no money left at the end of the fortnight to even start to get your life back together.

This means people remain homeless for longer, and the longer you are homeless, the harder it is to get back on your feet.28

This opens with the dull uninspired type of syntax often found in government or business press releases, and of which Watson complains—there is very little in the way of active verbs, and no actual ‘characters’ in the grammatical subject positions in the first paragraph. ‘While federal and state governments are working …’ is the nearest we get to ‘characters’ but they are cast in a dependent clause, not as the main characters in the subject position of the sentence. Indeed, there are no characters, as the main part of the sentence is ‘there must be wider acknowledgement that it has become almost impossible …’ I will discuss in Chapter 2, following Williams (1995),
the increased readability of prose constructed in a ‘character + action’ structure.

At first glance it might appear that the initial part of the article has emanated from a government media release, since a few days earlier the Federal government had introduced legislation to establish the National Rental Affordability Scheme. But while I found several press releases on this topic, I did not find one that could be clearly identified as the basis for this paragraph. I did, however, find the following on a government website:

In March 2008 the Council of Australian Governments agreed to the key elements of a ground breaking new Intergovernmental Agreement on Commonwealth-State financial arrangements, which will be finalised by the end of 2008. The new financial framework will lead to a significant change to Specific Purpose Payments (SPPs)—which are payments made to the states and territories by the Commonwealth to pursue national policy objectives. The Supported Accommodation and Assistance Program (SAAP) is currently funded through an SPP. (Department of Families, Housing, Community Services and Indigenous Affairs) 29

Although it is difficult to work out any clear meaning from ‘managerial’ prose like this, it does seem that this unnamed government writer is trying to provide information on a new initiative. Characters of sorts have been constructed in this prose: ‘the Council of Australian Governments’, ‘the new financial framework’, and ‘the supported Accommodation and Assistance Program’. But these characters are insufficient to save the piece from turgidity. The prose tells of a world of agreements, arrangements, frameworks and programs, with not a human being, nor a ‘word byte’ in sight. This is an example of business language that Watson argues ‘has spread through the pursuit of business models in places that were never businesses. ... It is the language of all levels of government ... They speak of focusing on the delivery of outputs and matching decisions to strategic initiatives. Almost invariably these strategic initiatives are key strategic initiatives’30 (emphasis in original).
The writer of the newspaper article I chose has actually commenced by referring to the government’s initiative, using similar language to that of the government: ‘A key element in any strategy to alleviate homelessness …’, but by the time he reaches the last two lines of his first paragraph, it is clear that he is saying that this new strategy is not enough to deal with the problem. The sentences in his second and third paragraphs are structured quite differently. There are no literary devices (it wouldn’t suit this subject matter), but there are characters and actions: agencies … have … to place people … people remain homeless … The writer now uses a lucid, unadorned but graceful style, to give readers a clear sense of the struggles of both the agencies and the homeless people. There is far more chance of such sentences functioning as ‘word bytes’ and having some impact on readers, than there is of the ‘managerial’ style prose quoted above (significantly, the writer of the article, Michael Perusco, is chief executive of Sacred Heart Mission in Melbourne, one of the agencies to which he refers in his article). It is difficult to understand why the writer began his article in ‘managerial’ language. Perhaps in his agency role he has to read a great deal of such language; or perhaps he wanted to begin in the terms of the government before going on to make a very strong argument that the initiative proposed is simply not enough. It’s a pity, though, that he did not commence with ‘word bytes’, because in its published form it would not invite busy, information-overloaded readers to proceed much beyond the first couple of lines, and therefore his important argument would be missed.

This is obviously not a representative sample of newspaper prose, but it does show that we can find examples of ‘word bytes’ quite easily, even though ‘weasel’ words are all too common. But while managerial language may be a modern phenomenon, lack of clarity has existed for a long time, perhaps as long as humans have been stringing words together.

Words in the Information Society
Turgid writing, for example, has been around for centuries. Williams quotes the following sixteenth-century example:

If use and custom, having the help of so long time and continuance wherein to [re]fine our tongue, of so great
learning and experience which furnish matter for the [re]fining, of so good wits and judgments which can tell how to [re]fine, have griped at nothing in all that time, with all that cunning, by all those wits which they will not let go but hold for most certain in the right of our writing, that then our tongue has no certainty to trust to, but write all at random. (Richard Mulcaster, The First Part of the Elementary, 1582)

Equally, writers have been producing clear prose for a long time, as well as giving advice against turgidity. The following example (also from Williams), is from 1553:

Among all other lessons this should first be learned, that we never affect any strange inkhorn terms, but to speak as is commonly received, neither seeking to be over-fine, nor yet living overcareless, suiting our speech as most men do, and ordering our wits as the fewest have done. Some seek so far for outlandish English that they forget altogether their mother’s language. (Thomas Wilson, Art of Rhetoric, 1553)

Clearly, anxieties about how we should best put words together are not new. But Watson’s argument, that the present turgidity, and the ‘death’ of subtlety and beauty in written English is largely the result of the spread of ‘managerial’ language, deserves to be heeded. Why has managerial language proliferated? Earlier, I quoted Watson as saying that this type of language has virtually taken the place of the machine and the assembly line that were the important elements of the industrial age.

This idea is congruent with the view expressed in Robert Hassan’s book The Information Society, in which he states that ‘Information, in the form of ideas, concepts, innovation and run-of-the-mill data on every imaginable subject ... has replaced labour and the relatively static logic of the fixed plant and machinery as the central organising force in society.’ In particular, he argues that in our economic system (of neoliberal globalisation, or late capitalism), every aspect of our lives has been ‘financialised’. By this he means
that financial knowledge is the main currency. In other words, the total dominance of the buying and selling of, as well as gambling with, money—paper capital that is not based on manufactured products or on anything real. Such a hollow economy would need its own type of language to try and justify its existence—to cite just a few of Watson's examples: innovative and forward-looking; continuous improvement; growing (as transitive verb), as in growing your business, or growing the economy; stakeholders; bottom-line; productivity-driven; embedded, collateral damage; attrited; deconflicted. Unfortunately, these words certainly do resemble the hollow shells of eggs sucked dry by weasels, the name of the animal functioning as the metaphor Watson uses for business language—a ‘word byte’ if ever there was one!

It's likely that this type of business language has spread its tentacles into all areas of society. Even if writers don't want to use it themselves, if they want to debate an issue with government or business they find themselves debating in the terms of their interlocutor, as did the writer of the article I examined earlier. The writer was not from business, but running a charitable mission, and therefore probably needing to deal with businesses regularly. In addition, as the ‘financialisation’ of the world has increased in pace, the proportion of financial news in the media has grown. This has not necessarily been generated by journalists. Banks will offer to supply a news program with some expert commentary, and will fund the cameras and equipment necessary for the news crews to make this happen, complete with the bank sign or logo in the background. For newspapers, they will send press releases—as do all businesses and anyone who wants to get material into the media—written to resemble news stories. In busy, short-staffed newsrooms, many of these press releases will go into print with minimal editing.

But as Adam Deverell reminds us in his chapter in this book on corporate writing, for every press release aimed purely to drum up business for a commercial enterprise, there is also one doing something that is helpful to the community. And I would add that for every sentence in the media written in ‘weasel’ words, we find one that is stylish and nuanced. These are the words that will attract readers, no matter how much dross and distraction surrounds them, and that will stick in readers' minds.
Watson may well be correct in asserting that managerial language has infected every aspect of public language in the globalised information society, that managerial language has seeped almost everywhere, into:

both private and public sectors ... McDonald’s, your financial institution, your library, your local member, your national intelligence organization. It comes through your door and down your phone: in letters from public utilities, government departments, local councils, your children’s school, banks, insurance companies and telephone companies ...36

But with Hassan I want to argue strongly that ‘pessimism in theory as in life is a form of powerlessness.’37 Language is who we are, and we are language—wordlings indeed—and we can fight against its death by infection. In this case, the microbes come from neoliberalism, but they can derive just as easily from totalitarianism, as George Orwell showed long ago in his famous novel *Nineteen Eighty-Four*, which was as much about language as about society.

**Industrial Action—for ‘Word Bytes’**

Allies in this battle are not hard to find. Try talking to people who are influential in large enterprises; ask them—as I have—what they think of the language use of most of their colleagues, or of the public language of their company. See if they are happy with it. Usually they are not. But often they don’t know how to change it (perhaps present them with this book!).

Another thing you might try, when you need to get a point across to someone, and especially if it’s a someone in a large organisation, is to write a letter. Write it in a way that is well-judged and elegant, that has taken careful thought and time to craft each sentence, that constructs ethos, pathos and logos, appropriate to the writer and the purpose (see Chapter 4). You can send it by email or snail-mail, but snail mail is best as it’s now become quite a novelty. I always picture my recipients holding my letters in their hands, having to give them more attention than they would normally give an email, with all the other things on the screen distracting them. Fewer and fewer people
write or receive these sorts of letters now. The dominant view is that we must respond to almost everything by dashing off a quick email (which can then too easily be ignored, anyway), or not stop to write anything at all, because there will always be something else to do that is more pressing. Very little should be more pressing, I argue, than using language with care and passion, except perhaps talking to one’s partner, friends, or children—but that often is about using language with care and passion too.

When I have good reasons, I write these sorts of letters—to mayors, colleagues, bosses, people high up in large enterprises. I don’t always get the response I want, but I almost always get a response that shows the recipient has given my letter considerable thought. People are wordlings, after all, and will respond to words that have been put together with care, that have been crafted to entice their intended reader to switch off from all the other information for a moment, and take the time to read these words. I have termed such words and phrases, that hit their targets, ‘word bytes’, not because I want such words to conform to the information society, but because I want language—stylish, sharp, carefully constructed—to do battle with the ‘decayed’ language usually dashed-off in this speeded up world, to take it on even on its own terms, and to win.

This endeavour need not be limited to personal or work-related letters: an email letter to an editor can also be a vehicle for well-crafted ‘word bytes’; so can a comment or a post on a blog (see Chapter 13, ‘Word Bytes on the World Wide Web’), or even your own regular blog; a contribution to a special-interest site, of which the Trekearth example I quoted earlier is but one example.

We can also stop and question ‘weasel’ language whenever we hear it, as I describe radio presenter Jon Faine doing in my article in Appendix 13. As Fairclough showed in his book to which I referred earlier, it was a particular ‘weasel’ use of language by politicians and certain business leaders that presented ‘neoliberalism’ and ‘globalisation’ as inevitable forces against which humans were represented as powerless. As Burke has described in his poem with which I began, and elsewhere, humans are wordlings, we invented language. And it is language that constructs our reality: ‘We cannot look to reality to know what a word means; instead we must look at language to see what reality means. Words impose knowledge on us—they create a
reality for us.' Not all words we write or read can be ‘word bytes’, but we can certainly aim to eradicate ‘weasel’ words in our own writing, and to object to them strongly in the writing of others.

This, then, is the philosophy behind this book. *Word Bytes* is not a ‘manual’, offering ‘utilitarian doctrine’ which, as Watson says, is not much help in the battle against ‘weasel’ language, but instead it tries to break up a very large undertaking into small, manageable chunks, using current media genres in which to teach the necessary philosophy, knowledge and skills.

The first two chapters, as well as Chapter 5, deal with beginning, controlling and editing the ‘word bytes’; Chapters 3 and 4 explain pathos, ethos and logos—how to reach out to your reader, drawing on language arts that have survived over 1500 years, to shape a piece of writing that will reach out to readers in a personal way. Chapters 6–11 explain how to shape words into specific and popular genres that appear in many different types of media—magazine features, travel stories, op-eds, reviews of books, arts and culture, and different types of fiction. Chapters 12 and 13 show how press releases and other corporate writing can be crafted as ‘word bytes’, as well as blogs and other types of web-writing. In Chapter 14 I focus on researching, an activity that has changed almost beyond recognition in the information society, and which now requires very specialised skills if it is to be done with maximum efficacy. And in Chapter 15 I present the skills for those of you who wish to take your writing one step further—as many of my former and current students do—and send it off to be considered for publication. In the 14 appendices you will find a range of examples of each of the genres with which the chapters deal. Most of these examples have been published elsewhere; so they are examples of public language, and all of them have been crafted with thought and skill, but especially with passion and with care. They are testimony to the view that living in an information society or a Web 2.0 world does not mean that we should forget we are first and last ‘bodies that learn language’, the only thing that makes us human, that makes us ‘wordlings’.

**Notes**

2. Ross.
3 ibid.
5 Watson, p. 65.
6 The Poetry Archive.
7 Livingstone.
8 McRae.
10 Crystal, 2006, p. 271.
11 Orwell.
12 Scanlon.
13 Clemens and Pettman, p. 91.
14 Scanlon.
15 Crystal, 2008.
16 ibid.
17 ibid.
19 Watson, p. 4.
20 ibid., p. 8.
21 Woodhouse.
22 Fairclough, 2000, p. vii.
23 ibid., p. 12.
25 Watson, p. 2.
26 Green.
27 The full line is: ‘It is a truth universally acknowledged that a single man in possession of a good fortune must be in want of a wife’, the first sentence of Jane Austen’s Pride and Prejudice.
28 Perusco.
29 Australian government: Department of Families, Housing, Community Services and Indigenous Affairs.
30 Watson, p. 13.
31 Williams, p. 6.
32 ibid., p. 7.
33 Hassan, 2008, p. 23.
34 ibid., p. 28.
35 Radio 774 Morning Program.
36 Watson, p. 16.
37 Hassan, 2003, p. 128.
39 Foss, p. 183.
40 Watson, pp. 23–4.
To create ‘word bytes’—writing that will grab and hold readers—you need time. Attention-grabbing, economical prose rich in meaning does not emerge quickly or automatically, but as the result of much work and careful crafting. This is well-recognised, judging from the number of writers who have quoted the words of Blaise Pascal, seventeenth-century French writer, philosopher and mathematician. In a letter to a friend, Pascal wrote, ‘Forgive me for writing such a long letter, but I was too busy to make it short.’1 Clearly we need time, time to produce a first draft, and then more time to take control of it and wrestle it into shape. If you are already writing regularly, and have no problem sitting down to write well ahead of your deadline, then you can probably skip this chapter. But if you have trouble producing writing sufficiently ahead of time to give the redrafting process the time it needs, read on.

The main reason we do not get down to each writing task as early as we should is a sort of irrational fear of the blank page or screen. This is doubly irrational when we consider that most of us are constantly producing a great deal of writing. Every day, whether for work, pleasure or education, most of us are writing all kinds of things: emails, internet chat, postings on a social networking site, blog or journal entries, essays, theses, lectures, memos, reports, newsletters,
media releases, stories, anecdotes, memoirs, family histories, or poetry. The items in this list which inspire the greatest terror are most likely the ones we avoid doing until the last minute. We procrastinate by concentrating on one or more of the others (some students write great poetry when they are supposed to be writing an essay), or on something else entirely (I become very good at housework and gardening when I have things like this book to write).

Unless we are among those rare people who were at the front of the queue when self-discipline was handed out, most of us find it very difficult indeed to knuckle down to anything without an externally imposed deadline. But fortunately, we do frequently have external deadlines for writing tasks: the report that must be presented at the meeting on Monday morning; the assignment that must be handed in to your lecturer on Wednesday; the creative piece you have committed to be workshopped with your writing group on Friday afternoon. We might curse deadlines, but if we want to get anything finished in a given time, a deadline is a godsend.

Rushing to meet a deadline, however, doesn't usually produce writing that commands attention—that others want to read. To achieve this power in our writing, we need to draft and re-draft, and that takes time. Getting started early is the first step. For this I have a method that can help, which I use for almost everything I write. And it does work. My one-hundred-thousand word doctoral thesis was completed over several years during a very busy time in my life when, even if I did not work on the thesis for a week, I still had more than enough other work to occupy me full time. The entire thesis had to be redrafted twice, and I had to get each draft finished to a strict schedule to give myself enough time for the next redraft. This is how you give yourself enough time to do your writing justice. You start writing from the first moment the task is given to you. You will have already begun to think about it, so just convert those thoughts into notes or sentences. Fling them at the paper or screen, while having a cup of coffee, or scribble them on a piece of scrap paper while waiting for someone. Don’t worry about accuracy or grammatical correctness. Then, as soon as you can get to your desk, type up these original thoughts and add anything else you can think of to do with the task.

Of course, this will be pretty rough and uninformed, but often you will surprise yourself with ideas that come out in the very act of
writing, ideas that you didn't know you had until that moment. This early rambling will also alert you to what you need to research; so it's a good idea put little notes to yourself in this early draft: ‘Go and research X’, or ‘put more info in here’ and so on. Providing you don't make the mistake of attempting to write a complete and comprehensive first draft without actually doing the necessary research, then this device of writing a very rough, very early draft, almost by accident, as it were, is very helpful. Many of us like to research endlessly, and never get started on the actual writing because we always need to consult ‘one more book’ or have ‘one more surf’ through the web; but this is just one more way in which the fear of the blank screen manifests itself.

So start writing before you start researching and then go back to your writing every day while you're researching. This method will help you, too, in working out how much research needs to be done, as this will become clear as you go through the writing-researching-writing process. If you already have enough interesting content, then it's time to stop. Many professional writers start writing straightaway, without trying to work out in advance (beyond a rough structure) what they want to say. The writer Alan Bennett has said: ‘One seldom sits down [to write] knowing exactly what one wants to say; the knowing often comes out of the saying.’

I used to worry that I had ‘nothing to say’ in my writing. And it's true—if you sit around agonising and worrying instead of writing, then you won't have anything to say. But if you start writing, you may be surprised by what appears on the page or screen in front of you, as if by magic. On days when I feel so blocked I can't imagine writing another interesting or useful sentence in my entire life, I remember the wisdom in the statement by the philosopher Georg Lichtenstein: ‘One draws from the well of language many a thought one does not have.’ And Melbourne writer Robyn Annear says a similar thing: that a writer does not always know what he or she knows, but that writing is a way of finding out. I find this phenomenon magical—of ideas or insights, or on ‘bad’ days just a few interesting sentences that I did not know were in my head, appearing, seemingly unbidden, in front of me.

The human psyche is endlessly inventive in finding ways to stop us writing. All of us have made excuses such as: ‘I don't feel like
writing today’, or ‘I am too depressed/distracted/tired’ and so on. At these times, I re-read a quotation by the American writer Joyce Carol Oates: ‘I have forced myself to begin writing when I’ve been utterly exhausted, when I’ve felt my soul as thin as a playing card, when nothing has seemed worth enduring for another five minutes ... and somehow the act of writing changes everything ...’

So, writers write. Get something, anything, on to the page on a regular basis. Then you can start learning how to turn it into writing that will have the power to make others want to read it, and to remember it—the main quality of a ‘word byte’. For those of you who feel paralysed with fear at the very thought of putting a word on to the paper, the following trick is very helpful. Just tell yourself that what you are about to write is Nothing. Nothing at all. Certainly not a draft of anything. It won’t count. It’s simply to work out what you do and do not know. We could even call it the Zero Draft. Write or type that at the top of the page: Zero Draft. Then start writing anything, and keep writing until more than half the page is filled with something, anything. I guarantee that when you come back to this half-to-one page later, you will find something in it that you can take further—an issue, an idea or two, possibly more.

As the writer Walter Mosley says, if you don’t tend your writing, your ideas can dissipate like smoke. ‘You don’t go to a well once, but daily.’ So the next thing you must do is to make sure you keep working on this piece of writing for a set period each day until one draft is finished.

You can do this daily writing that will lead to the completion of the first (or Zero) draft in two ways: you can do timed writing periods, or quota-ed writing periods. Timed writing works like this. Well in advance of your deadline you sit down and start writing, saying, of course this will be rubbish, but I’m just exercising my wrist, or fingers, so it doesn’t matter. But—and this is the important bit—time yourself to write for, say, half hour blocks a few times each day. This method can be useful if you’re feeling blocked. You can give yourself permission to write absolutely anything—isolated words, flowcharts, a plan, or just plain waffling—for half an hour. Your work may start off waffly and nonsensical, but it will often move into something more interesting, which you can come back and redraft later.
So let’s imagine a few days have passed since you tried this trick, and now you’ve got something written on a few pages. Depending on what it is (for example, an essay, a report, a piece of creative writing), you’ve probably got parameters for it: what sort of opening is required, what sort of things need emphasis and so on. So in your next draft, try and shape it according to those parameters. You will also have in this draft some gaps where you need to expand because you have to go and research something—to find some precise details on an issue, perhaps some statistics.

For ‘quota-ed’ writing periods you don’t stipulate time; instead you tell yourself you will not get up from the desk until you have produced X amount of words. This is a good method for longer pieces of work. Start well in advance, and divide up the word length you think the finished document should be with the number of working days left until it is due. So if it is due in three weeks time, and needs to be 3000 words long, divide 3000 by eighteen days (eighteen because you can allow one day per week completely free of it), which equals 166.6 words per day. That is a very small amount of writing for a day—about three paragraphs. Let’s double it to about 300, so you will get it finished in nine days, which then leaves about eight or nine days for re-drafting. You must not get up from your desk each day until you have written 300 words.

In practice, on most days 300 words will seem fairly easy to produce. On good days, you may write two or three times that amount. But on bad days you will struggle even to produce that. When writing my thesis I would feel inspired on some days and write 1000 words or more. On other days, I would sit and chew my nails for hours. But I refused to let myself watch television, read a book for pleasure, or go to bed, until I had done it. Nowadays, whenever I think of that enormous manuscript, now a bound volume sitting on my bookshelf just to the left of where I am typing this, I marvel at how it grew slowly each day, from those little 300-word blocks.

You too can learn to fulfil a writing goal that right now might seem entirely out of your reach. Very little that we create is top quality straight away. Initially it may be, in the words of Walter Mosley again, ‘simply a collection of notions that may never be understood. Returning every day thickens the atmosphere. Images appear.
Connections are made. But even these clearer notions will fade if you stay away more than a day.\textsuperscript{5}

Former Australian Olympic marathon runner Steve Moneghetti made a speech many years ago at the Presentation Night at my children’s school. He said he had a rule that he would never allow a single day to go by without running. One night at about 11 p.m. he was on a plane returning to Australia. He had not run that day, and was anxious because he could not see how he would fit in his daily run before midnight struck. But when the plane landed he had an idea. He collected his suitcase and put it in his car. Then he changed into his running gear, and ran around the perimeter of the airport in the dark. I try to imagine how Steve must have felt as his feet pounded the tarmac that night—jet-lagged and dehydrated from the flight, he must have been longing to get home to see his family and to go to bed, but nevertheless he willed himself to exert this extraordinary burst of energy in order to keep on achieving the goals he had set himself.

To be successful in anything, we need to demonstrate this sort of persistence and dedication.

**Further Reading**


**Notes**

2. Warwick.
3. Oates.
5. ibid.
Characters and Actions
As human beings, we are hard-wired to respond to stories. This has long been known by people seeking to influence others: their speeches and writings are full of stories. And the tellers of powerful stories have always had avid readers and listeners. What do I mean by stories in this context? I mean prose that depicts *characters* and their *actions*.

Now you may be saying: ‘But I need to write a media article expressing a logical argument, I can't give my editor simply a story.’ Or you may be writing an annual report for your company, and thinking: ‘The last thing I need in it is characters.’ Or: ‘I need to write an academic essay, and my lecturer is not going to want imaginative writing.’

Wait a moment. With non-fiction writing, when I talk about *characters* and their *actions* I am using the words in a somewhat unusual way.

To illustrate, I am going to give you some pairs of sentences, and I want you to read through them quickly to decide which sentence in each pair you find the more vivid and interesting.
1a The banning of Santa Claus has been adopted this year by many kindergartens and childcare centres.

1b Many kindergartens and childcare centres banned Santa Claus this year.

2a The opposition party’s continued position on the protection of Australia’s borders was criticised by the government.

2b The government criticised the opposition for the position they continue to take on the protection of Australia’s borders.

3a The emergence of the USA as the world’s only superpower was heralded with concern by European governments.

3b European governments expressed concern as the USA became the world’s only superpower.

4a The decline in the road toll was cited by the Minister as being proof of the effectiveness of speed cameras.

4b The Minister said the declining road toll had proved speed cameras were effective.

All of the ‘a’ sentences are grammatically correct. But if they are compared to the ‘b’ sentences they cannot compete. Readers who confront vast quantities of prose each day are going to be drawn to the ‘b’ structure more quickly than they will be drawn to the ‘a’ form. If you don’t believe me, go to the websites of the major newspapers and compare my ‘b’ sentences with the sentences in the main articles, or in the excellent examples of published writing in the Appendices of this book. In the majority of cases the structure is identical—it is a character + action structure. And when it isn’t, it’s usually for a good reason, as I will explain later.

What is a character + action structure then? And why and how does it have the edge that I claim it has?

By a character and action structure, I mean that there is what I call a character in the subject position of the sentence, with the main action of that character conveyed in an appropriate active verb, following the subject. In the examples above, most of the ‘a’ sentences had phrases in the subject position: ‘The banning of Santa Claus …’; ‘The opposition’s continued position on border protection …’; ‘The
emergence of the USA as the world's only superpower ...'. These phrases all described situations or circumstances in an abstract way. There were no actual Characters in the Subject positions, as there were in the 'b' sentences.

In contrast, in the 'b' sentences, the following characters were chosen to occupy the subject positions: ‘Many kindergartens ...’; ‘The government ...’; ‘European governments ...’; and ‘The Minister ...’.

If this notion of characters in the subject positions seems difficult, don't worry because we are going to go through it step by step.

**Subjects and Verbs**

Everyone knows the everyday meaning of the word subject, but I am now using it as a grammatical term. I am going to give you the minimum grammatical knowledge that you will need in order to take control of your writing and to give it 'word byte' qualities. For those who feel they want a more extensive revision of grammar, go to one of the grammar references listed at the end of this chapter, and find out more about the terms I am using, and the terms for the component parts of the sentence.

In English, the sentence is our basic, complete grammatical unit. Its grammatical name is an independent clause (there are dependent clauses that are not sentences, but you don't need to worry about those just yet). I expect most of you know that the sentence expresses a complete thought, idea, or action. Here are some examples:

- Poverty causes all evil. (a thought or idea)
- I would like McDonald's for lunch. (a thought)
- My brother ate my chocolate. (an action)

You can see that thoughts, ideas and actions often overlap. For example, in sentence no. 1, ‘Poverty causes all evil’, this is both an action (poverty is causing something to happen) and it's a relatively abstract thought or idea. But we don't need to worry too much about classifying sentences; we just need to be certain when a string of words is complete and independent, and therefore a grammatical, correct sentence. For example, the following strings of words are not complete and independent and therefore are not sentences:
The cause of evil
Brothers and chocolate bars
Wanting McDonald’s

Most of you don’t need to be told that the above examples are not grammatical sentences. A sentence in English must, by definition, have the following minimum grammatical structure: subject + verb (+ object). (Sometimes, however, experienced writers will break the rules and use sentence fragments for effect. You will notice that I have used a few throughout this book.)

Objects
The object is often optional, depending on the type of verb. Let’s look at a subject + verb structure in more depth. You shouldn’t have any trouble identifying the subjects and their verbs in the following sentences:

Teachers talk.
Students write.
Dogs pant.
The rain falls.

Many verbs have a sort of in-built result to them, which may or may not be optional in the sentence. We call this result of the verb the object of the verb. Taking two of the sentences from the above list, let’s add objects after the verbs:

Teachers talk shop. (Some students may be tempted to insert a different object into this sentence!)
Students write papers.

You will notice that we can’t really add an object (= result) to my earlier sentence ‘Dogs pant.’ We can say ‘Dogs pant noisily’, but that’s telling us how they pant, by using an adverb (adding information to the verb), and not telling us any sort of result of the panting. ‘Pant’ is a type of verb that does not take an object. For those of you who like definitions, a verb that does not take an object is an intransitive verb, and a verb that does take an object is a transitive verb. Some verbs
can be both transitive and intransitive, such as the verb ‘to write’. For example, I can say ‘I write’ (without object but nevertheless a complete sentence). Or ‘I write books’ (with object: books).

In the sentences above, the verb ‘to fall’ is like ‘to pant’ in that it does not take an object. (When we want to talk about a verb, we use the base form of it, and we put ‘to’ in front of that, and we call this form the infinitive form of the verb.) As I mentioned in the previous paragraph, for some verbs, objects are optional (for example, to write, to talk)—those verbs will have objects in some circumstances, and in others they won’t. You can probably think of some verbs for which objects are compulsory. The verbs ‘to be’ and ‘to have’ are the most obvious examples. We don’t usually say, ‘She is.’ Something else is needed: she is a student. Similarly, we don’t usually say, ‘I have.’ But we can say: ‘I have two small dogs.’

**Adverbial and Adjectival Phrases**

Now, in the previous sentence, the word ‘dogs’ is the object. Here is another sentence with a similar subject + verb + object structure: ‘The girl reads a book every day at lunchtime.’ And just for good measure I’ve added the completely optional ‘every day at lunchtime’. This is an adverbial phrase. Why adverbial? Because it adds information to my verb. Information that tells us how, when or where about a particular action is adverbial. Adverbs are often single words, usually ending in -ly. As in: ‘The girl reads the book slowly.’ But, as I have just shown, a string of words can also be adverbial.

Another useful device is the adjectival phrase. Just as with a single-word adverb, this is a string of words, or phrase, but in this case it adds information to a noun (although the individual words in the phrase are not necessarily adjectives or adverbs themselves): ‘The girl reads a book, usually a romance or thriller, every day at lunchtime.’ The words in italics are an adjectival phrase, because they describe the noun—the book. The more you know the names of your important tools and devices, the better you will be able to manipulate them—all the better for giving your writing ‘word byte’ quality.

**Using the Character + Action Structure**

You can see from the sentence about the girl and the book that when we use the subject + verb construction in this particular way, we are...
usually telling a story in miniature and I am calling this a character + action structure. Remember those pairs of sentences that I gave you at the beginning of this chapter? I claimed earlier that the character + action structure was a storytelling structure that has a powerful ability to attract readers. If you use the same content, however, but write it using a non-storytelling structure, readers are likely to turn away bored. Have a look at a different version of my sentence about the girl and her book so that I can further illustrate the two different structures:

Reading a book, usually a romance or thriller, is what the girl does every day at lunchtime.

I’ll now put in brackets after each section, the grammatical name for that section of the sentence:

Reading a book (subject), usually a romance or thriller (adjectival phrase), is (verb) what the girl (object) does every day at lunchtime (adverbial phrase).

This sentence has a subject and verb, so it is grammatical, but it is turgid and boring; definitely not a ‘word byte’. If a sentence like this appeared in the media, or anywhere in front of a non-captive audience, most readers would be unlikely to get past the ‘ing’ of the first word.

Just for the record, when ‘ing’ is added to a verb, it is usually a gerund. Gerunds lack the vivid and active sense that the simple present or past forms of verbs convey, but are beloved by many people who want (often subconsciously) to make their writing sound serious and ‘objective’. In reality, it often doesn't make writing sound anything except boring.

**Active and Passive Voice**

Another way in which people (still often subconsciously) try to make their writing sound serious and ‘objective’ is with the passive voice of the verb. Again, in reality, it just quickly ensures that your readers turn away and find something more engaging on which to spend their precious time.
Verbs have two ‘voices’, active and passive. First I’ll explain the *active voice*, as this is the one that should be used most often, unless we have a good reason to do otherwise. You will recall the subject + verb construction I introduced to you earlier in this chapter. With that construction, we choose the important thing, person or concept to be the character, with their main action being expressed in the verb.

Now, when writers use the *passive voice*, the subject of the sentence does not do any action; instead it has something done to it. That is why we call it the *passive voice*: the subject of the sentence remains passive while something/someone else does the action. So if I re-write my girl-and-book sentence in the passive voice, we get:

A book is read by the girl every lunchtime.

You will notice that in my earlier sentence, ‘book’ was the object of the sentence, and ‘the girl’ was the character in the subject position. In this passive sentence, the object has now been put in the subject position, and is acted upon by the new object (the girl). A book is clearly not an interesting or appropriate choice of character in this sentence.

Here are some more sentences to illustrate the Passive Voice; the subject of each sentence is in italics:

*The lecture* was written by the professor.  
*The papers* were handed in by the students.

You will see that each verb is a two-part verb, and the first part is almost always composed of a form of the verb ‘to be’. Even if you have never heard of the passive tense before, you will be able to recognise it easily because of this structure. Like its name, the effect on readers of this construction is usually also a passive one—it’s limp and lifeless—and it should be avoided whenever possible. When we write our sentences in the passive voice, without a good reason, often the result is that an inappropriate, inaccurate, or just plain boring character ends up in the subject position, as with my girl-and-book example above. In the sentences above, the ‘lecture’ and the ‘papers’ are not the most interesting characters a writer could choose. And the dull, uninteresting passive voice of the verbs certainly will not attract readers.
Occasionally, however, we need to use the passive voice because it helps achieve the effect we want. If sentence no. 1 was part of a paragraph focusing on what was being written by whom, it might have been part of a longer sentence such as: ‘The tutorial outlines were written by the tutors, but the lecture was written by the professor.’ I still maintain that if there are flesh-and-blood characters available, though, writers should use them as characters in the subject position unless there is a very good reason not to.

The passive voice can also be useful, occasionally, if you deliberately want to create a passive feel in your sentence to aid your rhetorical effect, or if you don’t know or want to hide the actual characters. This is exactly the intention in those product recall notices that appear from time to time, such as: ‘A flaw in the transmission system has been detected in the X model of the Z sedan …’

**Using the Passive to Manage Flow**

For maximum clarity, sentences should start with something readers already know, and move on to new information at the end of the sentence. In this way, the information ‘flows’ into readers’ heads in a manageable way, holding readers’ attention without interruption.

Sometimes, we need to use the passive voice in order to manage the smooth *flow* of information in a sentence. When flow is not working optimally, readers get confused, have to read sentences twice, and then dump your piece and go on to the next thing that is clamouring for their attention.

Look at the following passage from page 103 of Joseph Williams’s book *Style: Towards Clarity and Grace*:

Some astonishing questions about the nature of the universe have been raised by scientists exploring the nature of black holes in space. The collapse of a dead star into a point perhaps no larger than a marble creates a black hole. So much matter compressed into so little volume changes the fabric of space around it in profoundly puzzling ways.

In this piece the writer has used the active voice for the verbs, as one normally should. However, because the content is fairly complex information, in order to make it optimally reader-friendly for most
audiences, other than astrophysicists, the passage needs to be redrafted to make the information ‘flow’ in a clearer way. We call this ‘managing’ the flow of information.

In this following passage, containing identical information, the writer has prioritised flow. This means altering some of the verbs from active voice to passive voice. The underlining shows where the flow is occurring, and the bolded sentence is the one that has been redrafted.

Some astonishing questions about the nature of the universe have been raised by scientists exploring the nature of black holes in space. A black hole is created by the collapse of a dead star into a point perhaps no larger than a marble. So much matter compressed into so little volume changes the fabric of space around it in profoundly puzzling ways.

Note how each individual sentence is structured so that it starts with something familiar or known, and moves on to the new material. This is what you should aim for when you are using terms with which your readers may not be familiar.

Here are two more passages. Read them and ask yourself which one is clearer:

There was discussion everywhere, from schoolchildren to ‘old diggers’, on how we would never know the truth [of the Gulf War] due to the very nature of the newsgathering. And the media itself, of course, disseminated this ‘embedding’ information.

There was discussion everywhere, from schoolchildren to ‘old diggers’, on how we would never know the truth [of the Gulf War] due to the nature of the newsgathering. And this ‘embedding’ information was itself, of course, disseminated by the media.

The second one is clearer. The first sentence in both passages ended in ‘the nature of the newsgathering’. To start the next sentence
with ‘And this “embedding” information’ makes clear to us what the ‘nature of the newsgathering’ was: journalists ‘embedded’ with the Allied troops.

So the challenge in writing material with ‘word byte’ quality in this frenetic information society is this: we want, wherever possible to use the ‘storytelling structure’ of character + action; but sometimes choosing the most interesting character will mean that we have to use the passive voice of verbs.

We need to maximise flow in this way to keep our readers reading, for two important reasons:

1. When we put in our sentences things that are unfamiliar to our readers, we give them a reason to stop reading unless we immediately go on to explain what the new or unfamiliar information is.
2. If we do not do everything possible to pull our readers along and make the reading experience easy and pleasurable for them we give them a reason to stop reading.

To summarise: put at the beginning of a sentence those ideas that you have already mentioned in the previous sentence, or those that your reader is already familiar with and will readily understand. Put at the end of your sentence the newest, most surprising, most significant information, information that you want to stress—perhaps the information that you will expand on in your next sentence. If it’s a final sentence, end on something interesting that you want to stick in your readers’ minds (one of the main features of a ‘word byte’). The beginnings and ends of sentences are generally the most memorable parts. Finally, although we should most commonly use verbs in the active voice, so that we maximise the appearance of characters, we will always have to balance this with managing the flow of information. As always, though, it is crucial that in every sentence we write, we choose our characters wisely.

Selecting Our Characters Wisely
For prose to be powerful it needs characters. Now a character in a story is someone or something doing some action. And it’s the same in sentences. It doesn’t have to be a human being. If the human is the agent of the action, then certainly that human needs to be named as
the character. But often, depending on what we are writing about, there are other agents of the action. In the following sentences I have underlined the agents of the action, both of which I have put in the grammatical subject position.

1a Poverty causes untold suffering.
2a In the early years of this century, the western nations split along a fault line caused by their different views on the second Gulf War. (Note the use of an adverbial phrase before the character/subject.)

Both of these sentences could have had other things in the subject positions, but they would either not have been characters, or they would not have been a vivid and interesting character. For example:

1b Untold suffering is caused by poverty.
2b Different views on a war against Iraq exposed fault lines among western nations in the early years of this century.

In sentence 1b I needed to use the passive voice if I put ‘Untold suffering’ in the Subject position, making poverty seem less culpable for the suffering. From a storytelling (as well as social justice) point of view, it is far better to have Poverty as the evil character that must be fought against, as in sentence 1.

In sentence 2b ‘Different views on a war against Iraq’ is a nebulous concept, and cannot function as a character, thus lessening the ‘word byte’ quality of that sentence. If you find you have a string of words as subject, it usually means you should rewrite the sentence.

We confront this element of choice almost every time we write a sentence, and it is crucial that we choose well if we want our prose to have a powerful effect on its readers. Beginning writers often find it very difficult to choose the most interesting and appropriate Characters to put in the Subject positions of their sentence, and this makes their writing much less interesting and vivid than that of more experienced writers.

But don’t imagine that experienced writers necessarily get it right first time. We usually make much better choices of characters
when we write a second draft of our sentence. An example? When I first wrote the first sentence of the paragraph above this one, the sentence beginning ‘We confront …’, I wrote the following:

(First draft) ‘This element of choice that we face almost each time we write a sentence is crucial in terms of how powerful an effect our prose will have on its readers, and it is a distinguishing feature between the writing of beginners and that of experienced writers of powerful prose.’

When I read over it later I was horrified. I had put ‘this element of choice’ in the subject position! What a boring choice! Who is going to become interested in that? It’s not really a character, yet we do get a sense of someone doing something in that sentence. I call such hidden characters ‘shady characters’, and they need to be named properly and brought out into the clear light of day.

I followed my boring string of words in the subject position with a long adjectival phrase—‘that we have almost each time we write a sentence’—and I followed these fourteen words by a little boring Verb—is. I always smell weak writing when I see a long string of words followed by a little do-nothing verb form such as ‘is’, ‘has’, or ‘gets’. If that sentence had stayed as it was, I think most readers would have switched off by the end of the first line, if not earlier.

So I went back and redrafted. I decided that in this business of trying to create ‘word bytes’, the main characters or agents of action were we, the writers. Yes I know that ‘we’ sounds funny, but it is correct; if you doubt me, go look up the rules for pronouns when using the verb to be. I don’t use language this formal when I’m just talking conversationally, of course, but this is a book and if I don’t get the grammar correct, my editor will chastise me! The characters or agents of action (we), then had to be followed by the action they were doing which was ‘confront’. My verb ‘confront’ was then followed by its object, ‘this element of choice …’

When you write a sentence using this construction of the character in the subject position of the sentence, followed by its important verb, you are, by default, using a storytelling structure, a configuration that has the potential to give your writing ‘word byte’ qualities. Don’t waste the potential of this structure by writing the sorts of limp,
vague sentences I have been showing you: combine your knowledge of the storytelling structure with a little more know-how, and you will be well on the way to giving your prose the capacity to reach out and grab its target audience, and to make them want to read on until the end.

**Getting Rid of Flabby Sentence Beginnings**

Another obstacle to creating ‘word bytes’, one related to shady characters, is the ‘flabby sentence beginning’. You saw above how my original sentence took 14 words before it got to the verb. Fourteen words are far too many and make for a very flabby start. Stories get their audiences to the action as quickly as possible, and the action is embodied in the verb, remember? So in my redraft, ‘We confront…’, I took the reader straight to the verb in the second word. You will notice that in my first (boring) draft I only had the nondescript little verb form ‘is’, and the real action was sort of hidden away in my initial 14-word noun phrase: ‘This element of choice that we face almost each time we write a sentence is crucial …’ So I could have started my second draft with ‘We face …’. And I almost did. But before I typed it I asked myself the question one should always ask at second draft stage: ‘Is this the best possible verb I could use here?’ I decided that ‘confront’ was a much more interesting verb than ‘face’, and of course it is. It conveys more of a sense of action, of conflict almost, and is much more vivid than bland old ‘face’.

**Choosing Verbs with Care**

Sometimes, you will be confronted with three or more possible choices of verbs (especially in a language like English—a sort of ‘Creole’ language historically composed of several others, with multiple synonyms for many of our words), and you may wonder how you can possibly decide which Verb sounds the more interesting. This is a particular challenge to people writing in English as a second language, but in my experience these writers can and do learn to make choices every bit as informed and astute as native speakers. I often confront this challenge myself, when I write in my own second language, French.

There are only two methods, as far as I know, for making these informed choices. First, what is your ‘gut’ feeling? Say the words
aloud, alone, then in the sentence. Which sounds the most pleasing to you? Second, you must read widely in the language and genres in which you wish to write powerfully. Writing that is powerful enough to make someone want to publish it is writing from which we can learn a lot. There are excellent examples of all the genres covered in this book included in the Appendices at the end.

To return to verb choice: the important thing is to choose a verb that seems vivid and active. I illustrated this with ‘face’ and ‘confront’, above. In secondary school writing, students are often taught to convey vividness with adverbs. So they write sentences like:

The man walked quickly and noisily across the room.

It is far more arresting to say:

The man stomped across the room.

Or instead of:

She cried loudly and mournfully all night.

It is far better to write:

She wailed all night.

You will see that the verb ‘stomped’ is conveying the same image that it took three words to convey in the first sentence. And it is the same with the verb ‘wailed’. I call such verbs *muscular* verbs—they are strong enough to do the work of three words! Whenever you can replace three words with one, you must do it, especially if that one word is an interesting, evocative word. Writing that wants to function as ‘word bytes’ makes use of muscular verbs, because it needs to get its message across quickly and clearly amid the stiff competition of all the other media messages constantly bombarding us.

Muscularity is not restricted to just verbs. The same principle exists with nouns. Why write ‘a small dilapidated dwelling’ when you could write ‘shanty’, why write ‘a horrible nagging old woman’ when you could write ‘harridan’ and so on. A thesaurus (digital or book) is
extremely helpful when you are searching for more muscular words, and is an essential tool for anyone seeking to make their prose more powerful (see Further Reading list at end of this chapter).

**Above All, Be Concise**

By now you should be getting the message that writing with ‘word byte’ qualities gains maximum effect in the most engaging and economical way. By engaging, I mean prose that grabs its readers because it uses a storytelling structure, with the characters and actions in the subject and verb positions in your sentences, wherever possible. And as with stories that attract readers, ‘word byte’ writing is economical.

I have just shown you how to be more economical with nouns and verbs, but you should try to practise economy of words, or concision, in every sentence you write. You do this by watching for tautology or redundancy. These two characters are forever lurking in the writing of my students, weighing it down and thereby reducing its power.

Tautology is saying the same thing twice. We often use tautologies without much detrimental effect when speaking, usually to stress our point. But it is death to ‘word bytes’. Here are some examples of tautologies:

- The dogs ran out of the gate *in quick succession, one after the other.*
- Most of the students she taught *were young delinquents with criminal backgrounds.*
- She was *indecisive and could not make up her mind.*

In each sentence, the group of words in italics is providing similar information to the group in bold. One group can therefore be cut out. Incidentally, a book was published in 2003 with the tautological title of: *Scandal: A Scurrilous History of Gossip.*

Redundancy is similar to tautology in that it means unnecessary words, weighing down a sentence. Again, it is the ‘waffly’ style of some speech, spilling over into our writing. Sometimes they are ‘weasel’ words, as noted by Don Watson in his book *Death Sentence,* which I discussed in my introduction. In any case, we can usually cut
out several words, sometimes substituting only one, and retain the meaning.

Here are some examples of sentences with redundant words:

I do not want to visit her at this point in time.

Melbournians have been warned to be on the lookout for a group of escaped crocodiles and alligators that broke out of the zoo last night.

Here are the above examples, redrafted:

I do not want to visit her yet.

Melbournians have been alerted about a group of crocodiles and alligators that escaped from the zoo last night.

The redraft of the second sentence reduced the number of words by seven!

**Taking Control**

Writing made up of ‘word bytes’ can capture its audience; it is writing that demonstrates the principles I have explained in this chapter. When you are in control of your writing, you can start manipulating it in various ways to increase its efficacy. You now know that you have the power to choose the character that you think readers will find the most interesting. You have the power to choose the most active and vivid verb. And because you know the parts of the sentences, and the functions they perform, you can start moving them around, and trying out different effects.

You can even use the passive voice instead of the active occasionally, if it suits your rhetorical purpose, or if it aids you to manage the flow of new information in your sentences. In addition, you can make sure that every word in your sentences justifies its inclusion, that it is not there simply because it spilled out of your head unconsciously. In the information society, less is definitely more: the leaner and more carefully judged the sentence is, the more likely it will function as a ‘word byte’, enabling it to gain and keep readers’ attention amid the constant competition.
But a word of caution: if you are trying to write a first draft of something while keeping all these new concepts in your head, you might find that the ‘editor’ part of your brain becomes so brutal that you write nothing. You just feel too inhibited! This is where you need to send the editor away, albeit temporarily, and do what I call the Zero Draft (see my Chapter 1). With this draft, you will remember, you just tell yourself that nothing matters as it’s ‘not a real draft; it doesn’t count.’ Then leave it for a day or two.

When you return to it, underline all the subject positions and the verbs in your sentences. With each sentence, ask yourself the following questions to guide your redrafting:

- What’s really going on in this sentence? What is the real action here?
- Have I rendered the agent of the action as the character and put it/him/her in the subject position? And have I chosen the best possible verb to convey that action? Could I choose a better verb?
- Are all my verbs in the active voice, unless I have chosen the passive for a very good reason?
- Do I begin sentences with known information before moving on to new information at the end? Do I then begin my next sentence explaining that new information?

Now underline any adjectives and adverbs in each sentence. Could you get rid of them, and convey what you want to say with a better choice of verb or noun? Use your thesaurus to see what other words might be available to you. Now go through your draft and check for any tautologies, redundancies and anything else that could be improved.

**Further Reading**
*Collins Paperback Thesaurus.*
*Roget’s Thesaurus.*
Death Threats to Print Media
Print is the most enduring media form. Printed media has existed since at least the seventh century in China, where the wooden printing block, or woodcut, was invented to be used with ink to print books of scriptures. One example of a printed book from this era—indeed the world’s earliest book—can be seen in the British Library in London: the Buddhist scripture the *Diamond Sutra*, dated at 868 CE, found in a cave in north-west China in 1907 by archaeologist Sir Marc Aurel Stein. The invention of the world’s first moveable type, in China in the eleventh century, allowed printed text to be produced much more quickly and with infinite variety so that print could become a truly mass medium. During the twelfth and thirteenth centuries in China, tens of thousands of books were printed, as well as many newspapers. In Europe, printing has existed since 1440 with German Johann Gutenberg, and in English since William Caxton printed the first book in England in 1477. Newspapers became established in England in the seventeenth century, quickly spreading to America, and then later to Australia in the early nineteenth century.

Less than two hundred years later, in the late twentieth century, many people began predicting that print media, at least in book form, would soon die out.
But now, in the twenty-first century, books are still with us, mainly because there is nothing that can fully replace them. Certainly many works literature have been transferred to digital formats, but few of us read much of them on screen. With its backlighting, it's not the most comfortable way to read. Even if we obtain material from a digital format—as you may well have done with this book, for example, since it's published as a downloadable e-book—most of us still prefer to read it as hardcopy, whether as an actual book, or even as A4 sheets.

Many books have been recorded into an audio format such as CDs, but they don't seem to have caught on in the way that other media forms have. For a start, it takes us much longer to get through a novel or non-fiction book if we listen to it read aloud, rather than if we read it silently to ourselves. And time is at a premium in the information society.

But another form of print media has been in danger of extinction: newspapers. The sales figures of newspapers were the first casualty of the information society. In the early 1980s there was a rapid change in media consumption: VCRs became widespread in homes, and rental videos became everyone's favourite media form. In addition, individual car ownership increased and more and more people began driving to work instead of taking public transport. What do you see people doing on public transport? Listening to their iPods or reading, often both together. Then in the 1990s came interactive multimedia (such as playstations, computer and arcade games), 'Pay TV', the internet and DVDs. These new media forms caused people to turn away from print media, which were less engaging and entertaining.

In addition most of us began to have a significant proportion of the daily news 'broken' to us by other sources—radio, television, email, online newspapers. By the time we look at a hardcopy newspaper, the news reported in it is twelve to twenty-four hours old and has been widely broadcast elsewhere.

The New Newspaper Writing
Despite all of this, newspapers continue to exist, mainly because they have evolved and changed. All mainstream Australian newspapers now have online editions, and two newspapers exist only in an online
format (the Brisbane times, and WA Today), and although the two editions are not ‘parallel’, often displaying quite marked differences, nevertheless we can usually find in both paper and online formats the fine detail, the background, the ordering, analyses and discussions of current events. But much of this type of information is now presented differently to how it was even two decades ago: it is presented in an entertaining way.

Some people have termed this new style ‘infotainment’. This style has transformed not only the writing style of much newspaper prose over the past decade, but also the topics chosen. For example, ‘human interest’ topics are very popular today—tales of ordinary lives and everyday activities in the culture they represent. This ‘infotainment’ trend has also ensured that articles have become shorter; that they feature more, and often coloured, pictures; larger headlines; eye-catching layouts; and special sections—business, technology, sport, travel, television, lifestyle, entertainment guide and so on—in both formats. In addition to this, several magazine supplements accompany the weekend paper version, when it has been shown that people have more time to spread out the paper and browse through it, rather than just scan it online.

**Newspaper Writing before the Information Society**
The predominant writing style prior to the 1990s in most mainstream metropolitan daily newspapers was the bland, neutral tone of what was thought of as ‘objective’ reporting. Its lack of a personal voice had a practical function, since any reporter could imitate it, making for uniformity across a newspaper. But once it became necessary to lure people back from spending all their disposable time with what they saw as more entertaining media forms, a bland and neutral prose style was a distinct disadvantage in the competition for consumers.

A different, more ‘entertaining’ style of newspaper writing had in fact been around since the 1960s. But it had not markedly affected the almost universal bland and neutral style of newspaper prose—or at least not in Australian newspapers. Elsewhere, however, mainly in the United States, this new style was known as the ‘New Journalism’. Its best-known proponents were Tom Wolfe, Joan Didion, Truman Capote, Gay Talese, Norman Mailer, Jimmy Breslin, Jane Kramer and Gloria Steinem, but there were many others.
The commentator Jack Newfield said that New Journalists ‘use symbols, imagery, and imaginative language and structure ... They set a mood, and experiment with character development, and try wild stabs of intuitive insight. They have a point of view and they are personally involved in whatever they are writing about.’ It is obvious that writing with these attributes will be able to reach out to readers, to make and hold personal contact, by engaging readers’ emotions. This is the specific way in which examples of this genre of writing can function as ‘word bytes’.

**Literary/Narrative Journalism**

Gradually, over the past twenty five years, much of the prose of the surviving newspapers has been transformed by many characteristics inherited from what used to be termed the New Journalism. This prose is called—when anyone bothers to define it—‘literary journalism’ or ‘narrative journalism’. A useful term is ‘literary/narrative journalism’; ‘narrative’ denotes its storytelling quality, while ‘literary’ denotes writing valued because of its ‘qualities of form or emotional effect’, according to the *Shorter Oxford English Dictionary*. The old bland reporting style can still be found, of course, but more and more this style is inflected by literary/narrative devices.

So now we find that even the hardest-hitting articles—on war, torture, world events, serious crimes—can often begin with a story-like scene, or with deft characterisation, even if they do then gradually slip into the traditional ‘reporting’ prose style further into the article. And many are written entirely in literary/narrative style.

Analyses of ‘hard’ news events are also often inflected by literary/narrative devices. In many articles, of all types, writers will use their own experiences as evidence for their arguments, or will present the people they are writing about as well-rounded characters, using literary devices of characterisation. Most of all, in this prose, writers create an individual, personal voice that seems to reach out to readers with empathy, with a shared sense of values or understanding. The writing constructs for its readers a clear sense of a living, breathing, and often idiosyncratic writer speaking directly to his or her readers in a personal, familiar manner.
Changes in Newspapers’ Format and Style
I mentioned earlier the specific magazine-style sections, in both hard-copy and online formats of the newspaper, that now contain as much or more writing than the ‘main’ news section. Almost all of these sections are now written in a literary/narrative style (the business and technology sections might be the exceptions). The most ‘personal’ or familiar of these writing styles can often be found in the regular columns. Often accounts of daily life, these columns are significant either for their lyrical writing styles, the insights they offer, their humour, or a mixture of all these features.

The special sections of newspapers are especially easy to access in the online editions, usually by clicking the relevant heading—sport, say, or entertainment—in the banner at the top. Readers of the paper version may read the more ‘public affairs’ news in the first few pages, before turning to the more ‘entertaining’ sections, but online readers can avoid that altogether since there is usually only a headline, or perhaps a brief ‘hook’ on the homepage. I hope that where this is the case, readers are obtaining their public affairs from another medium, but in any case it is only by virtue of the move to ‘infotainment’ or to literary/narrative writing styles that newspapers have been able to compete successfully with other media for our attention. This type of writing is popular because it demonstrates the essential characteristics of effective yet entertaining communication by reaching out to readers to hook them in, to engage them, and to make every effort to keep them reading to the final word.

Media analysts and journalism teachers alike have recognised this rebirth of narrative in newspaper writing, and the central role it has played in remedying newspapers’ circulation woes. As American journalist Mark Kramer says: ‘Narrative hugs and holds readers, which is just what is wanted in these times of dropping newspaper circulation and wandering audience attention … Narrative is remarkably well-suited to transforming tedious topics by offering revealing moments in the lives of people involved and affected.’

Analysing Literary/Narrative Writing
If we unpack the essential attributes of literary/narrative writing, we can learn to emulate the personal and individual voice, and the
resultant emotional connection with readers, both of which can endow it with ‘word byte’ qualities.

Literary/narrative writing, while inflecting many news articles, appears to its best effect in what I term ‘Personal Narrative Articles’. These are told in a personal, empathetic voice, and create a strong sense of the writer making direct contact with readers. The daily columns are perhaps the best examples, but these personal narrative articles also come in the form of short personal articles which the newspapers sometimes term ‘essays’ (although they are a million miles away from school or academic essays), or else give them a headline that denotes the general topic, such as ‘Faith’, or ‘Bookmarks’, or ‘This life’.

Because of its strong personal voice, the personal narrative article also excels at maximising a reader’s emotional engagement. Writers who practise the skills of this type of article find it so much easier to maximise the effects they want when working in other genres—the press release, for example, or the newsletter, advertising copy, travel articles, or even fictional stories.

We will now look at specific devices of the personal narrative article, using as examples excerpts from four published examples, all reprinted in Appendices one to four.

The Personal Narrative Article: a Story with a Point
The main reason for the existence of the personal narrative article is to make a point, while entertaining readers. The point will not be as overt as an actual logical argument. Instead there will be a subtle purpose threaded through a story or reflection on a particular topic. Often a reflective musing will be coupled with storytelling elements in a personal narrative article. Some articles will be either ‘stories’ or ‘reflections’. But in either case, by the end a point of some sort needs to have been made. This point should be a single, unified point, not several diffuse, inter-related ones. A good test of whether you have achieved a single point in a personal narrative article is to try and sum it up in a few words. Or better still, ask a few friends to read the piece, and then ask them to sum up the point in a few words. If you ask three friends and you get three different ‘points’, you will know you need to redraft in order to focus your point.
If you read published pieces that are personal narrative articles, take note of the title, as this will often contain words that sum up or signal the point or perhaps the theme. Personal narrative articles do not come flagged under particular headings in the newspaper; rather, they will be in the form of columns or ‘essays’ or general human interest articles. The articles written in many of the blogs now attached to major newspapers are often written in the personal narrative style. This style can even be found in the Opinion or Comment section of newspapers (personal narrative articles and op-eds can often overlap). You will recognise it by the personal voice usually evident right from the start, sounding just like a friend telling you a story. Here is one example I have just found very quickly in today’s Melbourne newspaper *The Age*. I found it online, but it is also in the paper version.

One grey morning recently, I sat in Bourke Street and watched the jeans go by. I saw jeans faded at the knees and bleached around the pockets; jeans slung so low they revealed their owners’ underwear (or worse); jeans with legs so tight they might have been tights. I saw a prosperous-looking woman in jeans and long boots; a businessman in belted Levi’s; a shop assistant squeezed into skinny jeans and a grey-haired couple in matching faded denim. (Suzy Freeman-Greene)

Note how the ‘I’ character is there from the beginning, immersed in the scene and therefore in the story. We can’t yet tell what the point is, but the theme is certainly to do with jeans. Point and theme are closely related. The theme can best be described as your particular take on the subject you have chosen. This angle will be a recurring pattern, unifying the piece. The theme also must be focused and unified, not multiple. At the end of the piece, you will make a point that has arisen directly as a result of your exploration of the theme.

The following articles I discuss are all reprinted in the Appendices. In Dan Burt’s article ‘And Another Thing’ (Appendix 1), his theme—albeit presented humorously—is the ‘pompous undertaking’ of memoirs penned by famous people (focusing on the
recently published memoir by former Australian treasurer Peter Costello); his point is the absurd and ridiculous nature of most such ventures. Henrietta Cook’s article, ‘Strangers in the House’ (Appendix 2), has as its theme how risky house-swapping can be. The point, though, is that such bad experiences should be viewed with humour, and one should not ‘lose faith in human nature’.

In Andy Drewitt’s piece, ‘The Day I Stopped Killing Animals’ (Appendix 3), his theme is the pointlessness of our learned desire to shoot animals, while his point is ‘don’t shoot animals unless it’s with a camera.’ In Corey Hague’s piece, ‘Going Home’ (Appendix 4), the theme is ‘a lonely, homesick country boy sits on a station platform, feeling despondent’, while his point is that ‘the concepts of loneliness, helplessness, and especially “home” are all relative terms.’ This conclusion comes to him as an ‘insight’ after talking with the old man he meets, a new understanding that is signposted in the newspaper headline above the actual title.

The Beginning
If you want to grab a reader’s attention, it is always best to start in the middle of things, or in medias res, as it is correctly termed. As I discussed in my introduction, if deployed appropriately this device can be effective in helping to give your writing an attention-grabbing ‘word byte’ quality. This might require you to start in the middle of a scene, a thought or a concept. No introduction or preamble should be needed. If you do need to put in some background, this can be done later by means of a flashback or through a reflective section, as in Andy Drewitt’s article in Appendix 3. In that piece, as in Corey Hague’s in Appendix 4, note how the first word is ‘I’, followed by an active verb. And in Dan Burt’s article, the first, dependent clause has ‘I’ as it’s second word, and the first word of the main clause begins with ‘I’ as well.

Not all PNAs start with the ‘I’, but the most vivid and engaging ones will usually start with one of the characters, followed by an active verb. This immediately plunges us into the scene. Note in the following examples, all from published writing, how we are plunged straightaway into the middle of things, almost transported into the scene ourselves.
I was wearing a pale blue seersucker hospital gown that joined at the nape of the neck with velcro—I had taken my nightie off as it was soaked with blood and amniotic fluid ... (Hannah Fink)

Another way of beginning is to reflect on something:

I feel for young people today. Taught from an early age to have feeling and regard for the environment, they reach young adulthood and behold the reality that we have a food crisis, an oil crisis, possibly irreversible environmental damage and a record population globally. Small wonder some retreat into binge drinking. (Martin Flanagan)

With this reflection, we are still plunged right into the middle of the thought. The author doesn't need to give us a long preamble about global warming and all the other problems of the planet. Published in 2008 in Australia, this piece could assume its readers would have certain knowledge about the current state of the world, and contemporary social issues.

Another way to begin is not only to bring in the ‘I’ and an active verb, but also to make explicit the theme of the piece—Melbourne weather:

It was in Tokyo on a Woody Allenesque afternoon in autumn that I realised how much I love, and have always loved, Melbourne weather. (Catherine Deveny)

Another interesting way to start is to ‘hook’ the reader. With this extract, we are pulled in, wondering why and how the author behaved that way towards her grandfather:

I was never particularly kind to my grandfather. (Amy Choi)

In the next piece, the focus—the cousin, and her way of life—is clear from the beginning; and the unusual details of the gifts build the atmosphere straightaway.

32 Word Bytes
My cousin sends me reminders of her country from time to time—a bird woven from a palm frond, a parcel of sundried mangoes. (Gina Perry)

The following has a gripping start:

I have MS [multiple sclerosis]. I can't, and don't speak for anyone else who has it. I avoid people who have it, not wanting to see how dire MS can get. This is the universally acknowledged head-in-the-sand coping method. (Michele Maloney)

It's obvious this piece is going to be about the illness MS, but the writer makes clear that this is not a medical article, but a very personal one. Her self-deprecatory 'head-in-the-sand' approach is intriguing, and draws us in, as this method of coping is usually one we are taught to avoid. A less experienced writer would have started by telling us of when she first discovered she had MS, and the nature of the diagnosis. These details are not given until the third paragraph, and are condensed into just five sentences. Many personal narrative articles are humorous. With these, the humour needs to be evident right from the start:

My computer got sick last week: it just came down with some kind of bug, I don't know—its disk went all floppy, and its interface was pale, and when I asked it how it was feeling, it said, ‘Oh Danny ... it hertz ... it mega-hertz. (Danny Katz)

Computers—not the most engaging topic for a general audience, perhaps—are clearly the focus here, a focus made entertaining in the hands of Danny Katz, a very experienced writer on humorous topics from everyday life.

Dan Burt's writing is also in this category, although in his articles he often focuses on illuminating a current affairs topic, always in a very humorous way. Here is the beginning of his article in Appendix 1.
If I were Peter Costello, I’d be smirking too. He’s got pretty much no responsibility, his mates have yapped endlessly in public about how terrific he is and he was paid by taxpayers to sit on the backbench while he tapped out, then promoted, his memoirs. (Dan Burt)

Another recent article by this writer focused on the trend in recent years of celebrities adopting orphans from the developing world. Note how the start of this article assumes a certain amount of current events knowledge in its readers.

An orphan is not just for Christmas. They also make a great Easter gift. Soon, every celebrity will have one and the Third World will disappear, one boutique baby at a time. (Dan Burt)

The Writer/Narrator
As we can see from these beginnings, in the personal narrative article the roles of writer and narrator are virtually synonymous, and are represented by the pronoun ‘I’. When the article is either partly or wholly a story, the ‘I’ is situated within the world of the story. Andy Drewitt situated himself as a hunter in the anecdote of the shooting expedition, in the first half of his piece. Corey Hague was on the suburban platform for all of his, and Henrietta Cook was in that disgusting Paris flat for much of her article on house-swapping. When the article is—either wholly or partly—reflective, the ‘I’ is there as a disembodied narrator, musing on the particular issue under discussion, as was the case with Dan Burt’s article on Peter Costello’s memoir. Whatever pattern the PNA follows, the ‘I’ has to be in there, by definition.

The Focus and Voice of the ‘I’
As in those four examples, the ‘I’ in a personal narrative article usually focuses on something or someone outside the self. This focus is then explored in relation to the self, but the self is never really the object of the focus. In cases where the ‘I’, or an aspect of his or her behaviour is the focus, this will usually be a fairly general issue to which most people can relate. But no matter what the focus, the voice presented
to the reader will be a personal, not formal, one, almost always emotionally involved with the focus. This voice will be reflective in tone at times, and will meditate upon the theme.

Subject Matter
As you can see from the examples of personal narrative articles in the Appendices, as well as from all the excerpts on these pages (especially see the ‘Beginnings’ section) personal narrative articles tackle a wide range of topics. But these topics have one thing in common: most people have at least some interest in them. And this has to be the case if a writer is aiming for publication of a personal narrative article. If, however, a writer’s target audiences is a very specific group, then the topic may well be something that only this group will find interesting. Such pieces might include an article that functions as a speech about someone’s life, suitable for reading aloud at a birthday or anniversary celebration. Or an employee may be writing an entertaining piece for a company newsletter. Long family letters can also be improved with personal narrative techniques, as well as essays on family history. The hardest articles to write are those which are intended for an audience of many thousands, such as the published pieces from which I have taken my examples. For those, writers need to select topics that could be broadly described as community-integrative. Such topics are about things in society in which we all have an interest, or have a responsibility for: giving birth, babies, children and childcare, the elderly, education, illness and health care, growing-up, middle-age, weddings, death and coping with the death of loved ones, loneliness, the environment. Then there are topics to do with our daily lives, such as computers, the weather, the turning of the seasons, or just the weekly pattern of life in one location or another. And of course, in Melbourne at least, the ever-present football. So anyone writing a PNA needs to think carefully about their choice of topic. Topics which are fascinating to us are not necessarily fascinating to others.

Characters
Many personal narrative articles feature other characters, in addition to the ‘I’. These characters should be portrayed carefully and vividly, such as Corey Hague’s old man, or Henrietta Cook’s mother. There isn’t room in a personal narrative article for much character
description, so well-chosen details, deftly rendered, do the best job of making a character seem real. Consider the details Henrietta Cook used to paint the portrait of her mother: ‘... it wasn't long before my mother went into a cleaning frenzy ... Taps were polished, doonas aired, paths weeded, windows cleaned and floorboard cracks vacuumed.’

These details show the efforts the mother went to prior to their swap, and heighten the disappointment when they arrive at the Paris flat to find even basic cleaning had not been done.

**Settings**
When a personal narrative article is of the story type, and sometimes when it is of the reflective type, it will have a setting. Like characters, settings should be depicted through a few well-chosen details. These details will of course be filtered through the consciousness of the ‘I’ character.

Corey Hague depicts the station where he is sitting in this way: ‘I lit one of my eight cigarettes and watched longingly as a train that was futile to me pulled to a noisy halt and ejaculated its eclectic array of passengers into the falsely lit evening.’ In this description the reader can experience the setting through several senses—always the best way to make a scene vivid: we have the tactile sense of the cigarette between our fingers; we hear the noise of the train and see the people spilling out. And we are motivated to imagine the specific quality of light (artificial, bright) on a train station at midnight.

**Storyline**
Not all personal narrative articles contain an actual story, and one example is Dan Burt’s article, but many do. Andy Drewitt’s piece contains a story of the hunting trip, which occupies about two-thirds of the piece. Corey Hague’s was almost all story, except for the ‘I’ character’s reflection in about the last fifth of the piece. Henrietta Cook’s article is story nearly all the way through, in the sense that we feel we are with her in the filthy Paris flat. The ‘I’ character’s reflections about the situation are also there, but they are interspersed with the story. Stories are there to be a vehicle for the ‘point’ of the piece. Drewitt’s duck-shooting story showed the futility of the killing by presenting us with the effect that the act had on the shooter, the ‘I’ character.
Hague’s story showed us his dislocation and loneliness, and then presented the other man’s story, which contrasted starkly with that of the ‘I’: ‘I took my feeling of helplessness and multiplied it by about a thousand, and I knew I still wasn’t close.’

**Pathos, Ethos, Logos**

Taken from Classical Rhetoric, *pathos* is an appeal to readers’ emotions, *ethos* is a demonstration of one’s authority or reputation, and *logos* is a logical stance or argument. I talk more about these features in the next chapter (‘Where word bytes started’), but an introductory knowledge of them can be very useful for personal narrative articles, or for any writing that seeks to reach out to readers, and to keep them reading; in other words, writing that seeks to have ‘word byte’ qualities.

In Drewitt’s piece, the sense of *ethos*, or authority, was invoked by the fact that the author had once been a duck shooter, so he was well qualified to talk about the topic. In Cook’s piece, she and her mother had actually been through that experience; and in Hague’s piece, the authentic tone of the country boy stranded on a station platform bestowed all the ethos needed for that topic. *Logos* is not overtly required in a personal narrative article, as there is not generally a formal argument, as such; but certainly there needs to be a logical stance throughout the exploration of the theme, leading to a point that seems to arise logically from this exploration.

*Pathos* is probably the most important rhetorical ingredient for a personal narrative article: it’s essential that we make a strong emotional connection with readers early in the piece. Hague does this right from the start: he’s despondent, on a station platform at midnight, and then he starts feeling homesick. We are drawn in to these familiar emotions, wanting to know how he will resolve this situation.

The primary emotion evoked by Burt’s piece is of course mirth, and the strength of this evocation ebbs and flow throughout the piece. It builds up gradually from the first line, rising steeply in effect from the third sentence where he asks if an employee of, say, Hungry Jacks [hamburger chain] would get away with writing his memoir while at work. ‘Hey, I know I work here but get off my back about grilling patties! I’m in the middle of the anecdote where Stacey drops
her phone in the deep-fryer.’ The use of direct speech makes the scene more vivid and compelling.

**Showing and Telling**

Direct speech is one way of ‘showing’ us a scene. Readers will take much more notice of something if they are ‘shown’ it, with word pictures, rather than told it. ‘Showing’ generally takes a lot longer than ‘telling’, though, and so you can’t show everything. The trick is to decide which parts to show and which to tell. But telling has its place too. In Hague’s piece he tells us exactly how he is feeling, but also adds in some ‘showing’ details that function almost as symbols of his mental state: ‘I had eight cigarettes left in my packet and $13 in my bank account to buy the necessities for the next week.’ In Drewitt’s piece, the short scene at the campsite after he has shot the duck shows us but does not tell us his feelings: ‘That evening I helped with the dishes. [Not having to do the dishes was supposed to be his reward for shooting the duck.] I couldn’t sit still. And, after that weekend, I sold my guns.’

Showing is also a good device to give information about characters, in a way that draws readers into the piece. In the following sentences, the ‘Showing’ parts are taken from the published article, with the ‘Telling’ parts written by me, as an example of the sort of thing that beginning writers often write—not exactly ‘word byte’ material!

**Telling:** The man looked badly dressed and poor.

**Showing:** He approached near the City Square, the soles of his runners flapping. His hair was long and greying. It was a warm day, but he wore a light jacket and tattered tee-shirt. (Vin Maskell)

**Telling:** My house is in a very noisy area.

**Showing:** Opposite my house in the city a factory hums 24 hours a day; I can hear my neighbours through the wall. Trains shunt and shudder at my front door. (Gina Perry)
**Telling:** The man was dressed extravagantly.

**Showing:** This fellow should be on stage, I thought, as I watched his tall figure, elegant in silk shirt and trousers tucked into knee-high boots, pacing around our motley crowd of tourists. (Pamela Bone)

In the following extracts, the students wrote the ‘Telling’ sentences in their first drafts, and re-wrote them as ‘Showing’ sentences when I asked them to re-draft according to the principle of ‘Show, don’t tell.’

**Telling:** It was good food, Chinese takeaway. But we were not very hungry because we were so depressed, and the evening was a sombre affair.

**Showing:** My sister and I ordered Chinese takeaway for dinner that night, but at the end of the meal, I found I’d merely pushed the food around my plate eating almost nothing. My sister had picked over her meal as well, so we put the leftovers in the fridge. The food had reminded us of Mum’s cooking. We stayed up late that night, sitting silently in a lounge pervaded by the smell of Mongolian lamb. (Yuhan Lim, professional writing student, at the University of Melbourne, 2003)

**Telling:** My father and I had been rudely attended to while trying to rent a car at Hertz, in contrast to a Caucasian customer who had been the previous customer.

**Showing:** After she had finished booking the car for us, the unsmiling woman almost hurled the credit card back over the counter at my father. We should have left then, but stayed to ask for a map. She gave us a grunt, turned around, ripped a map violently from a pile of maps on the desk, and handed it to us, the edges untidily torn. I remembered how she had seemed a few minutes earlier with her previous customer, a Caucasian man. She had been chatty...
and friendly, offering him a map straightaway; she'd even volunteered to show him where the car was. (Eugene Lee, professional writing student, at the University of Melbourne, 2003)

**Telling:** I dressed appropriately as a waitress for my first day at work. I started out nervous and shy but soon became more confident, learning new things.

**Showing:** I showed up to my first day dressed in a black skirt and top, and wearing casual non-slip shoes. At first I spoke quietly and timidly, asking question after question. But it wasn't long before I took it upon myself to serve customers alone. Next thing I knew, I was able to do waitressing and use the coffee machine. (Aimee Neistat, professional writing student, the University of Melbourne, 2003)

**The Ending**

At the end of reading a personal narrative article a reader should be able to answer these questions:

- What is the point of this story?
- Why does it matter?
- And what does it say about life, the world, the times we live in?

The writer must be prepared to work hard to enable readers to find satisfactory answers to these questions. It is often difficult to be sufficiently objective about one's own work to answer these questions ourselves. We can try, certainly, but it's also a good idea to find friends who are fairly typical of the target audience, and ask them to read a draft and then comment on these questions at the end. If they cannot answer them satisfactorily, try to get one or two more opinions, and if they are all expressing similar opinions, give some thought to how you might redraft your piece to give greater satisfaction to readers.

**Writing Your Own Personal Narrative Article**

As you write or redraft, try putting yourself in your readers' shoes. What is interesting about your experience that will lure them in?
Perhaps the topic you have chosen is interesting, but you have not rendered it in the most reader-friendly way. Have you achieved the right balance of showing and telling? Is there too much of yourself in the piece, and not enough other interesting characters? Is the story logical and fast-paced? Do you take a page of preamble before you get started on the story? But above all, as with all genres of writing in which we hope to be effective, it is extremely useful to read a wide range of published pieces in this genre.

**Further Reading**


**Notes**

1 Conley and Lamble, p. 4.
2 British Library.
3 Newfield, *Columbia Journalism Review*, p. 59.
4 Giles.
In many ways writing is the act of … imposing oneself upon other people, of saying listen to me, see it my way, change your mind.

Joan Didion¹

This is the view of Joan Didion, a famous and acclaimed American writer. Didion goes on to say that writing is ‘an aggressive, even a hostile act. You can disguise its aggressiveness all you want … but there’s no getting around the fact that setting words on paper is the tactic of a secret bully, an invasion, an imposition of the writer’s sensibility on the reader’s most private space.’

She is not talking here of all writing, but only of writing that is powerful enough to ‘bully’ or ‘invade’—that is, writing with what I call ‘word byte’ qualities. Whether we like Didion’s terminology or not, we all know that if we are going to go to the trouble of writing something, we do want to be listened to, to make others see things our way, or to cause them to look anew at certain issues. In this context, Didion’s notion of aggressiveness can be taken to mean ‘self-assertive’ or ‘forceful’, as well as ‘developing or spreading very rapidly’. Of course, a great deal of prose is written that leaves its intended readers
yawning or unmoved, or does not even have the power to compel its
target audience to read on.

How can we be certain that the prose we write is not in this cat-
egory? Fortunately, we humans have been asking ourselves this
question for a very long time. And we can come up with some answers
because we have been studying what will turn readers on, rather than
turn them away, probably for as long as we have been using language.
This study has been termed the ‘art of words’, or Rhetoric.

The earliest evidence we have of the study of Rhetoric is from
465 BCE, on the island of Syracuse, a colony of Classical Greece. And
this study has continued to this day under the generic term of
Rhetoric. The Classical Greek scholars, the original Rhetoricians,
argued with and contradicted each other, and created—respectively—
various examples of powerful language that exemplified their own
approach. They didn't, and couldn't perhaps, define Rhetoric, and nor
could they agree to one definition on which everyone agreed. And
that’s still the case today. But in place of a definition they called what
they were studying and practising the ‘art of words’. They also
described various structures and devices that they believed gave lan-
guage the power to ‘bully’ its target audience. The word they used
has been translated as ‘persuade’, but the meaning of the original
ancient Greek word included the connotation—to make your readers
understand. This is as much an important facet of achieving ‘word
byte’ quality in your writing, as it was for the rhetoricians of the clas-
sical world, and of all ages. Three of the major rhetoricians I will
discuss here are Aristotle, Chaim Perelman, and Kenneth Burke.

Aristotle

We cannot talk about the ‘art of words’, or Rhetoric, without at least
mentioning the name Aristotle (384–322 BCE). Aristotle was tutor to
Alexander the Great, and founder of some of the first schools and uni-
versities. Aristotle didn’t ‘invent’ Rhetoric, and he wasn’t the only
Classical Greek philosopher involved in the study of it. But his book,
called simply, Rhetoric, has survived and has been very influential
throughout the centuries. Aristotle said, to put it simply, that Rhetoric
was the method by which one learns partly how to affect an audience
emotionally (pathos), and partly how to lead an audience through a
logical discussion (logos), using as part of one's 'proof' a construction of a certain type of character of the author (ethos).

This represents effective language as something logical, enjoyable and even gentle, worlds away from Didion's notion of powerful writing being an aggressive or hostile act. Maybe this is the whole point of successful rhetoric: readers are more likely to allow their minds to be changed if any aggressiveness is indeed disguised, and if they are enjoying themselves, if their emotions are aroused and if they are being led smoothly from point to point, by a voice they like and can trust.

These three main features of Aristotle's Rhetoric—emotions, logic and character often overlap. In much writing they can not even be totally separated. It is possible, for example, for a highly emotive piece, such as a personal narrative article, to contain also a thread of logical discussion; and it is also possible for a piece structured as a logical discussion to include some appeals to readers' emotions.

**Kenneth Burke**

If Aristotle sits at one end of the time scale in Rhetoric, towards the other end, in the twentieth century, we have Kenneth Burke. The key concepts in Burkean Rhetoric are identification and persuasion. Close to Aristotle's notion of affecting an audience's emotions, constructing a persona that the audience will trust, and then leading them through a logical discussion.

When people identify with and trust the narrator, or with the material presented, they will generally be persuaded. If these are the tactics of a 'secret bully', or of 'an imposition of the writer's sensibility', to use Didion's terms, it is worth remembering that for the bullying or imposition to occur, it has to be with the full consent of the reader. And readers do not give their consent easily, especially not in this too-much-information society. When the words work their magic, usually because of a combination of rhetorical devices, astutely targeted subject matter and the writer's commitment to the topic, we find ourselves giving this consent. It is because words can work this magic on us that Burke has called humans 'wordlings'.

It is our use of language, or more specifically our use of and response to Rhetoric, Burke believes, that enables us to live cooperatively on the planet, to 'get along'. And whilst it might not seem so in
times of conflict, in general we humans do get along, persuading each other to accept another’s views. This persuasion is achieved, most of the time, purely by means of words.

**Chaim Perelman**

Chaim Perelman doesn’t focus on emotions, but more on the ‘logical discussion’ end of the rhetorical continuum. He sees Rhetoric as being about the presentation of arguments. But he’s using the word ‘argument’ in a fairly wide sense here. For him, an ‘argument’ is anything the writer wants the audience to believe in, to feel, or to be influenced by. We could see this as ‘invasion’, perhaps, in Didion’s terms, but not an overtly hostile one; more a spreading, an intrusion or an encroachment. By Perelman’s definition, a personal narrative essay has an ‘argument’; in Chapter 3, I explained about the ‘point’ of these essays. Using Perelman’s framework, the ‘point’ would be expressed as the ‘argument’.

The major part of Perelman’s theories on Rhetoric are to do with techniques of argument, as he defines it. His two major categories of these techniques are Liaison and Dissociation. With Liaison, the writer states a first premise which s/he can logically assume most of the audience will agree with or accept. The writer then attempts to link this acceptance through to the conclusion, taking it step by logical step. Corey Hague’s essay ‘Going Home’ (in Appendix 4) is a good example of this. He talks about his feelings of dislocation in the big city, and we accept his loneliness; then when the elderly migrant man tell of his loneliness we are willing to transfer our empathy to him, and realise it’s far worse for someone in his situation.

With the second category, Dissociation, the writer aims at separating elements which a particular discourse or viewpoint has previously tied together. An example of this would be the many articles in newspapers from shortly after September 11 2001 onwards, explaining how Islam believes in the sanctity of human life, believes all humans are equal before God. These articles were in effect arguing by Dissociation: they were dissociating what they saw as the true nature of Islam from the activities of certain, so-called ‘Islamic extremists’. Like other rhetoricians, Perelman asserts that Rhetoric must always be audience-oriented because—he says—it only derives its value or effect from its action upon the mind of a particular
audience. So in a successful communication situation, there is what he calls a ‘meeting of minds’, not unlike Aristotle’s notion of arousing emotions, or Burke’s notion of identification.

‘Meeting of Minds’ or Public Discussion
This ‘meeting of minds’ is a type of discussion, and as Perelman says, ‘This is why every society possesses institutions to further discussion.’ By this he is referring mainly to the media (although other institutions that also further discussion include lobby and advocacy groups and unions). Perelman goes on to say that such institutions operate to further discussion between competent persons and to prevent others. And it’s true that not everyone can start publicly discussing anything at any time; airing one’s views in the media is strictly limited to a small group of people—mainly those who work for the mainstream media. This is changing, however, with the increasing numbers of internet forums, blogs and even with the opportunities for readers to send comments to newspapers for publication on their website. Examples of these are The Sydney Morning Herald’s ‘Heckler’ section, or the UK Guardian’s ‘Comment is free’ section, not to mention the more informal contributions readers are invited to contribute to newspapers’ and other blogs.

Those with a ‘position’ in society (e.g. a Member of Parliament, an editor of this or that, an Archbishop, an author, an academic) will get their views into the media far more readily than the average citizen. They will do this either via media releases, if they can afford a Public Relations professional, or via the op-ed or other pages of newspapers. But the average citizen who knows how to write ‘word bytes’ stands a good chance of getting their views into the media too, given the increased opportunities, thanks to the internet and to many sites with user production, subsumed under the term ‘Web 2.0’. Many voices can see the backlight of pixels in a country such as Australia that has a ‘free press’ (I’ll set aside for now the discussion about how ‘free’ it actually is, with about 80 per cent of the print media content generated by media releases from government or business). And in general, opinions are constantly circulating in the media, competing and challenging each other. Interestingly, one of the Classical Philosophers/Rhetoricians, Protagoras, from an earlier era than Aristotle, saw this public debate as essential, permitting opinions to
circulate, compete and challenge each other in a so-called democratic public sphere. Certainly, if the ‘bullies’ come from all sides of each argument, readers are at least making more informed consent than if the ‘bullies’ were all from the one side.

When tragedies or ‘big’ events happen, such as the September 11 2001 attacks on the World Trade Center and the Pentagon, the invasions and ongoing conflicts in both Afghanistan and Iraq, the global financial crisis of 2008, many different views can be found circulating in the media, often generating intense debate. It’s important, too, for domestic issues to be debated. In the last decade we have had lengthy and heated debates in the media about issues such as the Stolen Generation, asylum seekers, the Australian prisoner David Hicks in Guantanamo Bay. And in between the ‘big’ issues, we have discussion on the many topics that are seen as ‘community integrative’ such as childcare, cloning, abortion, Artificial Insemination by Donor or In Vitro Fertilisation for single women, to name a few.

All of the media forms participate in generating these discussions to a certain extent, but print media has a special role to play because its forte is in running the longer, discursive pieces in order to discuss issues deeply, to bring in other voices and to give relevant background information. While many of these pieces are published in both the paper and online editions, the research shows that people reading the paper version are more likely to read this type of background article, than are the online readers. This is due to many factors, including different reading practices for different formats (Scott Drummond mentions this in his chapter on the web), and the quite different layouts.

In any case, it is in these pieces that we find the rhetorical structures that writers are employing to get the members of the audience to believe them, to consent to be invaded, if you like. These structures are chosen to evoke in the reader some sort of emotional response, or identification, or meeting of minds (whatever you want to call it) while leading the reader through some sort of logical discussion.

I will now model an analysis of the rhetorical structures in three pieces of media writing, and explore the ways in which each author deploys devices that will maximise the impact of the ‘art of words’, encouraging readers to listen and perhaps to change their minds.
The first piece of writing is by Melbourne sporting identity Michael Long (see Appendix 5). The second is the essay ‘The World of Wrestling’ by twentieth-century French philosopher and writer Roland Barthes (the essay can be found in Barthes’ collection of essays Mythologies). And the third is a tribute essay to Barthes, titled ‘The World of Soap Operas’, by Melbourne writer Winnie Salamon (see Appendix 6).

**Michael Long’s Letter**

Long’s piece was published on the right hand side of the front page of the Melbourne Age. At the top was a small colour picture of the author. Michael Long was for many years a well-known and respected sportsman. He played for the Essendon Football Club, and in retirement has become a role model for younger players. The publishing and positioning of a photograph of Long, wearing Essendon club colours, was the first step in the art of ‘bullying’, or perhaps ‘manipulation’ of the reader (albeit enacted by the newspaper’s editor): it ensured that everyone recognised Long, and would pay attention to what he had to say. In the field of Rhetoric, this is known as the ‘ethos’ factor: invoking the authority of the author, showing how they are ‘qualified’ to speak on certain topics.

At the time this letter was published, the report on the Stolen Generation had recently been made public, a report that revealed how indigenous children had been removed from their families by the government and put in orphanages right up until the 1960s. Earlier The Age had reported how a government senator had argued in parliament that ‘only 10 per cent’ of Aboriginal babies had been taken from their mothers, and that the situation had not been as bad as the report made out.

Long’s piece is styled in letter format with a seemingly direct appeal to Prime Minister ‘Mr Howard’, a rhetorical structural device that heightens the raw and authentic tone. This device therefore maximises the emotional effect on readers, and is known as the ‘pathos’ factor in rhetoric.

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Long’s letter starts with a series of rhetorical questions. ‘How do I tell my mother that Mr Howard said the stolen generation never took place?’ (We say that a question is rhetorical when it is asked for effect only, not because the writer seriously expects an answer.) It is not until the fifth paragraph that Long states that his mother was taken as a baby from his grandmother, but we are able to infer this is the case from the first line. Straightaway we can accept how terrible it was for Long’s grandmother, mother and the wider family.

Now note how Long takes our acceptance of this first premise, and links it step-by-step to his conclusion. This ensures that many of us, by the end, are willing to transfer our acceptance to Long’s conclusion: it wasn’t just 10 per cent, and it was a terrible tragedy. These step-by-step links constitute the logical argument, or the ‘logos’ factor. In Didion’s terms, they may also constitute the ‘invasion’ of the reader’s thinking.

I’ll now look at the individual steps of this linkage. The first and third paragraphs of the letter begin with a repetition of ‘How do I tell my mother …?’; and the second with ‘How do I explain to my mother …?’ Long then asks if Mr Howard can understand how it feels to have one’s children taken away. He then paints a hypothetical scenario of his own children being taken away. This paragraph ends with three simple bald sentences: ‘It was wrong. It did happen. It was Government policy.’

It is after this that Long tells us about his mother being taken from her mother when she was a baby, and about the effect this had on her. He then reveals he can’t tell her anything because she has been dead for seventeen years. So he asks, ‘Who is going to tell her story …?’ This is a rhetorical question, used for emotional effect. Long’s argument finishes by asserting that he himself is ‘part of the stolen generation’ because ‘it has a rippling effect, so don’t tell me it only affects 10 per cent.’ Most open-minded readers of this letter, whatever their political persuasion, would be moved by the anger and grief contained in this simple, personal piece. And because of this emotional effect, they would be optimally primed (or ‘bullied?’) to accept Long’s main argument that ‘It did happen. It was wrong. It was Government policy.’

Long’s piece works its art or its bullying (however you wish to look at it) on its readers by the rhetorical features of logical steps
(logos), and emotional appeals (pathos); and as I explained at the start of this section, ethos plays a large part too, since Long is respected as a fair and reasonable man both in football issues and when he speaks about issues concerning indigenous Australians.

**Roland Barthes and ‘The World of Wrestling’**

In ‘The World of Wrestling’, Barthes’ argument is that we should appreciate and enjoy the spectacle of wrestling. His reasoning is as follows: wrestling presents pure human emotion as a spectacle, a real ‘Human Comedy’. Wrestling is ‘the intelligible representation of moral situations which are usually private.’ And wrestling constitutes ‘immediate pantomime’ that ‘unveils the relationship between a cause and its represented effect.’

His starting premise is that ‘ancient theatres were excessive, grandiloquent spectacles’, and therefore worth seeing. His conclusion, after a lengthy but logical argument, is that wrestling resembles ancient theatre, it is not just an ignoble sport, and is therefore worth seeing also. This essay was, of course, written prior to the televisations of wrestling; but wrestling then, which took place in small venues in the backstreets of Paris, was similar to that which is seen on television today. Not all readers today would be convinced by this essay to go off immediately to watch some wrestling. But many would begin to view the sport somewhat differently. At the very least many readers would gain some understanding of the cultural role that wrestling performs.

In terms of the ‘art of words’, Barthes employs a number of the standard rhetorical strategies to take the reader through the steps of the discussion. He evokes emotions, he uses very careful word choice, and he constructs the prose in an elegant and stylish way. The bullying here is well disguised.

A satisfying part of any argument or discussion is its intrinsic oppositions or contradictions, and this essay is particularly rich in this device. If we recall that Perelman talked about an argumentative technique of ‘liaisons’ or linkages, we can see that Barthes constructs linkages in his piece by using a ‘network of oppositions’. In fact, he uses this technique to the full: he sets up and constantly adds to the network. The network is rendered with extraordinary grace and style,
a characteristic that is particularly well suited to disguising the ‘aggression’ of attempting to change the minds of others.

As an example of this stylish network of oppositions, we can focus on one passage from the middle of the essay:

What the public wants is the image of passion, not passion itself. There is no more a problem of truth in wrestling than in the theatre. In both, what is expected is the intelligible representation of moral situations which are usually private. The emptying out of interiority to the benefit of its exterior signs, this exhaustion of the content by the form, is the very principle of triumphant classical art. Wrestling is an immediate pantomime, infinitely more efficient than the dramatic pantomime, for the wrestler’s gesture needs no anecdote, no décor, in short, no transference in order to appear true.

Each moment in wrestling is therefore like an algebra which instantaneously unveils the relationship between a cause and its represented effect.²

Note how the major point or assertion, that wrestling is like an algebra (a reunion of broken or disparate parts; or, a restoration of what is missing), comes after a long oppositional build-up, containing oppositions, or ‘disparate parts’. These oppositions are: passion versus its image; intelligible [public] representations versus private ones; interiority versus exteriority; content versus form; immediate pantomime versus dramatic pantomime.

The pairs are then followed by a very gracefully structured clause (actually the second half of the final pair of opposites): ‘... for the wrestler’s gesture needs no anecdote, no décor, in short, no transference in order to appear true.’ The gracefulness here is achieved by means of the object of the clause being cast in classical triadic form—with each of the three objects beginning with the same word, ‘no’, so that there is an echoing emphasis building up to the adverbial clause at the end: ‘... in order to appear true.’ And even in this final clause there are more stylistic devices—the initial ‘t’ of the final word, ‘true’, echoing the initial ‘t’ of the word ‘transference’ down to the...
monosyllabic ‘true’, pushing the emphasis of the final sentence to fall even more than it usually would on the final word, ‘true’, a word that is crucial to Barthes’ argument. It is easy to see how effective a disguise these devices are in the invasion of readers’ sensibilities.

Although the above example is only a small piece of Barthes’ essay, it contains a pattern that is repeated, albeit with some variation, throughout the whole piece. Many of the significant ideas are rendered as pairs. This pairing structure is set up right from the beginning, with the coupling of wrestling with the ‘grandiloquence … of ancient theatres’, in the first paragraph. In that first paragraph Barthes summarises for us the ‘evidence’ for his view—a view that will be given in full in the article—and then states his main premise in the last sentence of the first paragraph: ‘Even … in the most squalid Parisian halls, wrestling partakes of the nature of the great solar spectacles, Greek drama and bullfights: in both, a light without shadow generates an emotion without reserve.’

Note the grammatical parallelism in the final clause, in which the structure of the subject parallels that of its object, especially in the repetition of the preposition ‘without’. This is a well-known rhetorical device which can usually make even the most unpopular argument seem stylish and therefore more acceptable.

The triadic device was also used by Earl Spencer to open his famous eulogy at the funeral of his sister, Princess Diana in 1997: ‘I stand before you today the representative of a family in grief, in a country in mourning, before a world in shock.’ In addition to the effect of the triad itself is the rhetorical effect of focusing the reader (or listener) first on the smallest unit, the family, then opening up the view to the country, and finally on to the whole world. This device may be drawing on the rhetoric of Barthes, but Barthes was drawing on Perelman, or Burke, both of whom were in turn drawing on others, all the way back to Aristotle. Interestingly, many people saw Spencer’s speech as an overtly aggressive act aimed at the British Royal Family, an attempt at ‘bullying’ perhaps—according to Spencer’s detractors—that no amount of rhetorical devices was fully able to disguise.

**Winnie Salamon and ‘the World of Soap Operas’**

Salamon has self-consciously flagged her piece (in Appendix 6) as heir to the Barthes essay. She does this by echoing his title in her own, and
by using the same Baudelaire quotation as epigraph. In addition, her first sentence echoes that of Barthes: ‘The virtue of all-in wrestling is that it is the spectacle of excess.’ Salamon asks us to appreciate and watch soap operas as Barthes wanted us to appreciate wrestling matches.

The reasons she gives for this are as follows: the benefits of family cohesiveness, of bonding with strangers, the intrinsic pleasure of discussing the shows, and the escapism of watching ‘the image of passion and anger and happiness and despair’ without their ‘real life complexity.’ Finally she explains how these shows offer us a clearly understandable black-and-white world, in which ‘Good and Evil are easily distinguishable’, as an antidote to our real-life world.

Salamon’s starting premise is that soap operas ‘bring people together’. Her conclusion is that we should watch them because they present a simplified world of excess and spectacle at which we can safely vent our emotions, in contrast—she implies—to our messy, complex and incomprehensible emotional world that we inhabit in reality. After reading this piece, some readers will be convinced and will start watching *The Bold and the Beautiful* that very day. They are the easy victims for bullies. Others who are not so easy will at least concede that the familial or social cohesiveness soaps provide certainly sounds somewhat worthwhile.

Salamon’s rhetorical steps go like this: soaps bring family members together; soaps can also give strangers something to talk about. The argument then takes a turn to make a claim for some intrinsic positive features of soaps that go beyond but are still linked to their social effects: the thrill of gossip, the pleasure of ‘trashiness’. To complete her disguise of her ‘aggression’, Salamon then constructs some Barthesian ‘algebraic’ pairs: the simplified representation of passion and anger versus their real life complexity; realistic grieving versus wild, dramatic grieving; satire or parody or realism versus sheer spectacle; simple, black-and-white emotions versus greyer real-life emotions.

In the final sentence Salamon employs the classic triad to conclude her argument:

With their chiselled jaws, large breasts and wrinkle-free faces, the characters in soap-land give us a world in which
Good and Evil are easily distinguishable; a reality we can laugh at and cry with; and a microcosm we can completely understand.

This sentence has three objects, a world, a reality and a microcosm, each one grammatically and semantically parallel. Each of these objects has in turn a phrase that adds some information to its object. The first of these, ‘in which Good and Evil …’, is an adjectival phrase, and the other two are restrictive clauses starting with the pronoun ‘we’, followed by a finite verb. The heightened parallelism of the final two is a neat rhetorical flourish to the compelling triad of the final argument.

Conclusion
These three pieces are good examples of the manipulation of words to maximise the effect on, or the ‘invasion’ of, the audience, each in different ways. Michael Long’s piece is simple, dramatic and stark, mainly relying, for the disguise of its ‘bullying’, on evoking raw emotions in the reader. This is especially in the paragraph that focuses on trying to imagine how it would feel to have one’s own children taken away.

The Barthes piece uses for its disguise formal rhetorical features as well as a logical argument. But it was written for a very different, more discursive, and pre-mass-media era than ours, and unsophisticated readers today find its style somewhat daunting. The Salamon piece takes a similar subject—a media genre that is often derided—and argues a case for its ‘virtues’. She uses rhetorical devices to effect emotional appeals as well. This she mainly achieves with word pictures: the family sitting on the couch together, animated discussions with her grandmother, friendly chats with strangers. But a logical discussion runs through it too, one that argues for the emotional outlet soaps can provide for us, as respite from the complicated landscape of our real-life passions.

In each of these three pieces we can see how devices from classical rhetoric can be endlessly reworked to function as disguises in the ‘aggressive’ act of imposing oneself on others. As long as humans want to get, or ‘bully’, others to listen to them, want to make others see things their way, they will need the disguises that rhetorical
structures can provide. The principles of rhetoric are essential if we want our writing to be powerful enough to get the reader to believe us, or to take the action that we want them to take. We may want them to watch wrestling matches or soap operas, to buy the product, to march in the protest, to attend the concert, to adopt our view on the war and so on. And the discussion running through the writing must escort the reader step-by-step, and must be logical enough that it provides or shows good reasons for readers to consent to have their minds changed. We can greatly improve our chances of giving our writing 'word byte' quality, of getting others to listen to us, if we gain some of these understandings of the age-old 'art of words'.

**Further Reading**


**Notes**

1  Didion, 1980, p. 17.
3  ibid., p. 15.
Editing begins where the first flush of writing ends. If writing is about ‘getting it out’, editing is about ‘getting it right’. In this context, getting it right means making sure that the text is clear, factually accurate, well structured and free of mechanical errors. Above all, though, it means making sure that the text will communicate its meaning to its projected readers. Editing is basically intended to bring a reader’s perspective to bear before a work is exposed to the public. The editor sits between the author and the audience, at once lending the writer a sympathetic ear and acting as a kind of industrial advocate for the reader’s interests. This is a business that requires delicate handling.

There seem to be three main types of editing experiences. Type A is editing at its best. Here, the editor tactfully picks up the author’s lapses, gives lustre to the text and guides it to its audience. The author enjoys discussing the work with an attentive reader and finds it easier to revisit problem passages after learning how the editor has responded to them. At the end, both rest content in the knowledge of a job well done.

The Type B experience, by contrast, is a contest of egos, with the author and editor battling for ownership of the work. The author reacts defensively to every criticism, and the editor refuses to take ‘no’ for an answer. The ether buzzes with emails full of quibbles and
queries and conflict. At the end, both parties are fed up with each other and can hardly bear to think about the text they have produced.

The Type C experience is even more dangerous, because on the surface everything looks fine. The editor is happy because the job is running smoothly. The author feels relieved that the text doesn't need as much work as he or she thought it did. The problem is that it did need that extra work; the editor is only doing half a job. The flaws in the ‘finished’ work only appear after it’s published, and by then it’s too late.

What kind of editing experience you have depends partly on the writer’s skills and temperament, but it depends even more on what the editor brings to the process. Effective editing depends on establishing a relationship of trust and mutual respect between editor and writer. This requires the editor to have technical skills in the use of language, to consider readers’ expectations and to be tactful in communicating with the author. In what follows, I’ll discuss the kinds of questions you need to ask at various stages of the process, outline the tools you need, and offer some tips on how to set up the framework for a collaborative partnership so that you can have a Type A experience every time.

**The Stages of Editing**

It’s usually best to take editing in stages, beginning with the ‘big-picture’ questions and working down to the minor details. Publishers generally distinguish between two main stages of editing:

1. **Structural editing**: the first main pass through the manuscript to review its organisation, coverage and general tone
2. **Copy-editing**: the detailed edit aimed at fixing usage problems, tidying up badly structured sentences, establishing consistency and correcting minor factual errors (along with any larger problems that have been overlooked in the structural edit).

Let’s have a look at each of these stages in more detail.

**Structural Editing**

The reason for separating structural editing from copy-editing is that the first reading needs to be done at close to normal reading speed to
get a sense of the work’s overall impact. You might make some swift notes as you go, but you don’t work through the text line by line. Some editors deliberately keep their pens and pencils out of reach at this stage. This is your only chance to encounter the text afresh, as a new reader would, so you don’t want to waste it by getting bogged down in details. (There’s one exception to this rule, though: if you have an electronic copy of the text and there are so many minor errors that you find them distracting, it’s sometimes easier to do a quick spelling and grammar check first.)

It’s usually best to do the first reading on paper. In spite of computerised searches, most people still find it easier to move around swiftly in a printed copy than on screen. You will need a double-spaced copy with generous margins to leave room for comments and queries. (On the other hand, if you’re editing a short piece and are comfortable reading it on the computer, it’s best to single-space the text so that you can see as much as possible at a glance.)

In the first reading, you aim to approach the text as the projected reader will. If you’re editing a report that most readers will simply scan for its main points, it’s important to pay attention to the use of subheadings and the ‘scannability’ of the overall structure. On the other hand, if you’re editing a narrative piece that’s intended to be read word for word, you need to start at the first sentence and keep going to the end. And if you’re road-testing a reference work, you begin by using it as a reference work, following various lines of inquiry and seeing what turns up.

I also try to think my way toward the reader’s frame of mind. This can be a challenge when I’m reading a work on a topic where I have more specialised knowledge than the projected reader will. Then I have to start ‘reading in character’, mentally putting my expertise in the bottom drawer for a while and sensitising myself to terms and concepts that an inexperienced reader will find difficult. This is not a perfect process—obviously you can’t predict what every reader’s prior knowledge will be—but it’s a start. (If you’re really worried about the work’s impact, you could try enlisting a reader whose knowledge base is closer to that of the projected readership.) So what are you looking for in that first reading? It’s more an art than a science, but these are some of the questions that often turn up:
- Sense of purpose: What is this work’s reason for being? Is the purpose clearly stated, and does it consistently inform the work? Does the title clearly indicate the work’s purpose and emphasise what is distinctive and interesting about it? The writer’s aim often shifts as the writing proceeds; if this has happened, it may be necessary to revisit some of the sections that were written earlier and pull them into line with the later, more developed sections.

- Structure and coherence: Is the shape of the work appropriate to its purpose and readership? Do the divisions into sections or chapters suggest an orderly, considered progression? Is the sequence working so that each section builds on the ones before it, or does the text lose direction? Does it become repetitive or contradict itself? After you’ve finished reading, it’s often a good idea to set the work aside for a little, and then try to list the things that you remember most strongly. Is there a common pattern to them? Do they reinforce each other, or do you find their cumulative effect confusing? If the latter is the case, it’s a sure sign of a lack of coherence.

- Coverage: Gaps in coverage may be as simple as a missing definition or a failure to introduce the actors adequately. At the other end of the scale, you sometimes come across texts that duck key issues or fail to take obvious counter-arguments into account. There’s no easy recipe for detecting gaps, but if the argument is unconvincing or the text seems to be unclear about its basic concepts, it’s likely to be a sign of a gap somewhere. Broken promises fall into this category as well; it’s worth making a note of any promises the author makes and keeping an eye open to make sure that they’re fulfilled.

- Pace: Does the work have a strong sense of movement, or does it bewilder the reader with detail? Is the author waffling around without saying much? At the other extreme, is the text going too fast, skimming over the surface of its subject?

- Voice: Is the text addressing you in a way that makes you want to listen? If you are feeling resistant to the writing, it’s important to pin down the reason. Often the problem is simply that the author is nervous about the response the writing is likely to receive. This can manifest itself in stiffness or excessive display, both of
which are common defensive strategies. You can help the author to relax by suggesting ways of making the language less formal and highlighting elements of wit or humour. (Bad jokes, though, should get short shrift.)

• Narrative distance: In narrative genres, the closer the narration is to the subject, the greater the opportunity for sparking an imaginative response in the reader. Look for specific incidents that can be used to get the reader thinking. If the narration seems thin, it’s often a sign that the author has got caught up in intellectualising. You may need to nudge him or her to think about the incident’s visual, tactile and psychological dimensions.

By the end of the first reading, you should have formed a general impression of what needs be done to give the text more impact. What happens next depends on how large the project is and how much time is available. In deadline-driven environments such as newspapers and weekly magazines, changes often have to be made without consulting the author. This speeds the production process, but the cost is that the author receives little feedback and is more likely to make the same mistakes again (and again and again). If time permits, it’s better to get the author to make the structural changes, or at least to review and approve changes that have been made editorially. In book publishing, the author usually vets all stages of the editing.

The best way to initiate discussion is to prepare a written response for the author to read. This means going back over the work, making specific suggestions and raising queries about the problems you’ve detected. If you work by hand, you usually annotate a printed copy (marking suggested changes in pen and queries in pencil) and send it off with a covering letter outlining the reasons for the proposed changes. If you work electronically, you can add queries using the word processor’s ‘Comment’ facility and use the ‘Track changes’ tool to flag proposed amendments so that the author can review them. Whichever way you work, your comments and queries need to combine honesty with tact. You are trying to get the author to reconsider the text and collaborate in improving it, so your tone should be encouraging, not judgemental or high-handed. The last section of this chapter offers some detailed guidelines for preparing this kind of commentary.
Copy-editing

Copy-editing begins after the structural edit is complete and the author has supplied any additional material required. It is at the copy-editing stage that questions of usage and consistency come to the fore.

Copy-editing is far more rule-driven than structural editing. The editor corrects errors in spelling and punctuation, checks facts and tidies up loose expression. A good copy-editor needs to have a sharp eye for detail.

Often copy-editing also involves imposing a house style. Most publishers (and many other organisations) have in-house style guides that set out their preferences in the grey areas of English usage. Should it be ‘veranda’ or ‘verandah’, ‘judgement’ or ‘judgment’, ‘no one’ or ‘no-one’, ‘program’ or ‘programme’? Are ‘data’ and ‘media’ to be treated as singular or plural? Should we use ‘South-east Asia’, ‘South-East Asia’ or ‘Southeast Asia’? Should it be ‘website’, ‘web site’ or ‘Web site’? These aren’t issues of life and death; the main thing is to be consistent.

Some of the other topics that are likely to be covered in a style guide are:

- capitalisation (‘the parliament’ or ‘the Parliament’?)
- punctuation (should ellipses be … or …?)
- formats of references and notes
- the rendering of numbers (‘nineteen’ or ‘19’?)
- the use of abbreviations and acronyms
- the treatment of quotations (when to indent, and how to punctuate—a great source of controversy).

The copy-editor also needs to make sure that special elements of the text are consistently formatted—in particular, that headings are in the right hierarchy, and that uniform conventions are used for bulleted lists, tables, graphs and illustrations. Should subheadings be in lower case with only an initial capital, or are significant words to be capitalised? Are captions to be in italics or in a smaller version of the standard roman typeface? What format is to be used for table headings, and are the tables numbered consistently? These conventions are usually specified in the house style guide as well.
Where there is no house style to guide your copy-editing decisions, you tend to follow the author's preferences as long as they are consistent and lie within the bounds of acceptable English usage. This requires a certain amount of flexibility and sensitivity to authors' quirks. English is changing very rapidly, but it isn't changing uniformly. Older authors—and even some younger ones—cling to old-fashioned conventions as marks of distinction. Such writers tend to be intolerant of whippersnapper copy-editors who barge in and translate their work into twenty-first-century English. (You have been warned.)

There are even more grey areas in the subjective aspects of style, as distinct from mechanical questions of consistency. On the one hand, it is an editor's job to point out passages that are misleading, confusing or just plain flabby; on the other, this should not be used as a licence for imposing your own stylistic prejudices. As Amy Einsohn puts it, the copy-editor must 'strive to strike a balance between being overly permissive and overly pedantic'. In the end, you are editing the text, not writing it. There needs to be a good reason for every change; and 'I think it reads better that way' does not count as a good reason.

**The Editor's Toolkit**

If you're working on someone else's writing, you can't rely on memory. 'When in doubt, look it up' is a good operating principle. You produce more accurate work, and your relations with your authors are far more harmonious. Nothing is more certain to infuriate an author than an editorial 'correction' that introduces an error.

Editors require many of the same tools as writers, along with a few extra ones. Dictionaries, style manuals and guides to usage are all grist to the mill. Specialist reference works can also be handy in an emergency. My editorial library is less extensive than many I've seen, but it includes a fairly good supply of reference books on subjects ranging from Chinese history to *Reptiles and Amphibians of Australia*. And my street directory spends as much time on my desk as it does in my car (not a practice I'd recommend).

At the same time, reference works need to be taken with a grain of salt. Some enshrine their authors' prejudices; some are inadequately researched (or edited); and some go for far too long between
revisions. There is no Editor's Bible, but rather a series of works that are useful in different ways and have different limitations.

**Dictionaries**

Every editor (and any serious writer) needs an up-to-date desk dictionary. A pocket dictionary just isn’t enough. For Australian purposes, the *Macquarie Concise Dictionary* is probably the most widely used. It is more attuned to Australian usage than the English or American dictionaries, and has the virtue of being an encyclopaedic dictionary, which means that it includes information on people, places and institutions as well as ‘ordinary’ words. Its main competitors are the *Australian Concise Oxford Dictionary* (non-encyclopaedic) and the *Collins Australian Concise Dictionary* (encyclopaedic). The production of specifically Australian dictionaries is a relatively new phenomenon, though, and all these dictionaries include occasional oddities. If you come across something that seems suspect, it’s best to check another source.

A few traps to watch out for:

- If the dictionary gives more than one spelling of a word, opt for the first listed, which is the preferred one. This isn’t to say that the other versions are illegitimate, just that it’s easier to be consistent if you follow the dictionary’s preference.
- If you think a word is a compound (e.g. ‘washing-machine’) but it doesn’t appear in the dictionary, this indicates that it should be spelt as two words (‘washing machine’).
- When you find a compound that is hyphenated or spelt as a single word, check that it is the right form for the context. For example, if you want to use ‘machine gun’ as a noun (‘The machine gun was rusty’), the Macquarie recommends rendering it as two separate words, but the verb ‘to machine-gun’ is hyphenated, as is the adjective in ‘machine-gun fire’. Similarly, the back seat of a car is two words, but many dictionaries list ‘backseat’ as one word when in is used as an adjective (as in ‘backseat driver’).

The problem with print dictionaries generally is that the English language is changing so fast that dictionary publishers are hard pressed to keep up. Most of the major publishers now offer their
dictionaries in continuously revised online versions. The catch is that they are expensive. If you have access to one through a library, it's definitely worth exploring, but they're out of the reach of ordinary mortals.

To summarise: dictionaries are among an editor's most useful tools. They're never perfect, but any dictionary is better than none.

**Thesauruses**

Many writers and editors use the traditional *Roget's Thesaurus*. This has a comprehensive listing of synonyms. English is a language rich in synonyms because it is composed of several languages including Old English, Norman French, Latin, Anglo-Saxon and Norse. There will often be up to five words in English for a single word in other languages. But these synonyms are not all equal. Over time, their meanings have shifted somewhat away from each other. So the first word you think of is not always the best choice for a given sentence. The *Roget's Thesaurus* involves a two-step process for searching for synonyms and will enable you to make a detailed and thorough search for a better word.

But *Roget's* is often unnecessarily complex if you are searching for synonyms for the word 'walk', for example. For these simpler, words, I employ a simpler thesaurus, *The Collins Thesaurus*. So if I look up 'walk', I will find a long list of synonyms: advance, amble, march, moved, pace, perambulate, promenade, saunter, step, stride, stroll, traipse, tramp, trek, trudge, etc. If I cannot find a suitable synonym in this thesaurus, or if the word I want does not appear at all in it, I go to the *Roget's Thesaurus*.

**Style Manuals**

Style manuals take up where dictionaries leave off. The best of them offer information about the finer points of usage—punctuation, capitalisation, when to use italics, how to render numbers and so on—along with instructions on publishing methods. Although they cover many details that might seem trivial, they are invaluable for sorting out the kinds of niggling questions that slow you down, both in editing and in writing.

The manual most widely used in Australia is the *Style Manual for Authors, Editors and Printers* (sixth edition, 2002). This is where
you go to find out whether you should italicise the ‘HMAS’ before the name of an Australian ship (you don’t) or whether to use a hyphen (-) or an en dash (–) in ‘Sydney–Hobart yacht race’ (it’s the en dash).

Style manuals are not designed for bedtime reading; the best way to consult them is to use the index. Unfortunately, the sixth edition is less accessible than its predecessors, which had index entries linked to numbered paragraphs. If you happen to spot an earlier edition in a second-hand bookshop, it’s a good investment.

**Usage Guides**

Usage guides are different from style manuals in that they usually offer an alphabetical list of controversial areas of English usage. The early usage guides tended to pronounce from on high about the ‘proper’ use of English, but these days most are more inclined to list the range of acceptable usages, including regional variations and older forms that are losing currency. A particularly useful example of the latter approach is Robert Burchfield’s revision of Henry Fowler’s classic guide, published as *The New Fowler’s Modern English Usage* (1998). This is not a book to consult for quick and easy answers, but it provides a marvellous map of the stylistic controversies that have beset English usage past and present.

There are also some notable guides to Australian usage. The most comprehensive is Pam Peters’s *Cambridge Australian English Style Guide* (1995). More idiosyncratic but vastly more entertaining is Nick Hudson’s *Modern Australian Usage* (1997), a book that you can read for its wit as well as its wisdom.

**Guides to Editorial Practice**

Among the many editing manuals available, Elizabeth Flann and Beryl Hill’s *Australian Editing Handbook* (2001) is an excellent introductory work. Its only limitation is that it is primarily oriented towards manual rather than computerised editing. The two most useful reference works I’ve found for editing in the computer age are both American: Amy Einsohn’s *The Copyeditor’s Handbook* (2000), a fat volume that takes you from the most elementary aspects of copy-editing right through the intricacies of US usage, and Judith Tarutz’s *Technical Editing* (1992), which is chatty and full of hard-won insights into the way the world has changed.
Style Sheets
A style sheet is essentially a cheat-sheet. It is a manual record of the usage decisions the editor has made when working on a particular text, combined with a checklist of terms that need to be monitored for consistency across the manuscript. The style sheet normally has two parts: a summary of the general conventions used (punctuation, capitalisation and so on), and a roughly alphabetical word list.

The style sheet has two main functions. It helps the editor to check back on spelling and usage conventions, and it is useful as an aid to collaboration. If several people are going to work on a text, the style sheet will set out the ground rules for everyone to follow. The proofreader, for example, will be able to look at the style sheet and find out at a glance whether the editor has opted for ‘café’ or ‘cafe’, ‘Suharto’ or ‘Soeharto’, ‘Dostoevsky’, ‘Dostoyevsky’ or ‘Dostoievski’. (This function is less important in these days of electronic ‘manuscripts’, because it is possible to use the computer’s search function to locate earlier instances of a name, but it is still useful to have a record for instant reference.)

Where there is an established house style, the style sheet acts as a supplementary document. For example, if you are editing a text that includes website addresses and your house style doesn’t specify how to render them, you decide on the format to be used and make a note of it on the style sheet. On the other hand, if there is no house style guide, the style sheet has to do all the work that a style guide would normally do, setting out how the editor is handling numbers, capitalisation conventions, punctuation and so on. Under these conditions, the style sheet has to be compiled with considerable care.

Electronic Resources
The World Wide Web is an invaluable editing aid. Before the Web, just checking an author’s bibliographical information used to be a real chore; now you can do it in seconds through library websites, and with as much accuracy as you’ll get in any medium. There are also online dictionaries in many languages (some as specific as a German–English dictionary of railway terms, accessible through www.dictionary.com), and the 1996 Columbia World of Quotations is available free of charge via www.bartleby.com.
On the other hand, there are plenty of oddballs on the Web, and quality control isn’t exactly a feature of the medium. For example, if you’re trying to check the spelling of someone’s name—Arnold Schwarzenegger’s was a recent case in point—you’ll often get almost as many hits on the wrong spellings as on the correct one. You just have to keep looking until you find a reputable site.

As the Web expands, it’s also easier than ever to point authors toward sources that can help them to fill out gaps in the text or sharpen up sections that seem woolly or out of date. This kind of exchange can help to set up a strong sense of mutual trust, which is at the heart of a positive editing relationship.

**Developing Constructive Editor–Author Relations**

Effective editing is a two-way process in which both parties need to show some consideration for one another. The primary responsibility for managing the process rests with the editor, but the writer plays an important part as well.

**Ten Tips for Editors**

When you’re suggesting revisions to someone else’s work, the crucial thing is to find a way of saying what needs to be said while keeping the author on side. These guidelines are intended to help you comment on other people’s work without provoking World War III.

1. Remember that you are commenting on the text, not on the author. It is absolutely essential to help authors keep a critical distance between themselves and the work. If you say, ‘The introduction seems to be putting forward a different argument from the conclusion’, the author will look at the text and think about the problem. If you say, ‘You don’t seem to be sure what you’re arguing here. Your introduction is saying something different from your conclusion’, the author will instinctively go on to the defensive, and you will find yourself locked in head-to-head combat.

2. Trust—and analyse—your intuitive responses as a reader. If you find a text boring or unconvincing, the odds are that others who read it will feel the same. The trick is to work out why this is the case. Try to pin your responses down to particular elements of
the text. *When* did you start feeling resistant to the writer’s ideas? *What* makes the ending fall flat? *What* is it about the argument that strains the reader’s credulity?

3 Think outside the boundaries of the text. Don’t just consider what is on the page; think about what is missing as well. Is the text failing to engage because it is preoccupied with surface events and fails to communicate the writer’s underlying intention? Does it need to communicate a stronger sense of its context? Would an illustrative example help to crystallise the discussion for a reader who is new to the subject?

4 Cast your critique in positive rather than negative terms. When you detect a problem, try to think of how it might be solved. If you say, ‘The opening description of the stakeholders is confusing’, the author’s reaction is likely to be, ‘I know it is, but what do I do about it?’ It is far more helpful to say, ‘The opening description would be easier to follow if the stakeholders were grouped into a smaller number of categories. At present, the reader is being introduced to large number of people in quick succession, and it’s hard to remember who is who.’ If you can’t work out a solution, it’s still worth recording the fact that you had a problem, describing it as specifically as possible: ‘I found the opening description of the stakeholders a bit confusing. I started losing track of who was who.’ With any luck, the author (or someone else) will recognise this as a symptom of introducing too many actors too quickly, and the problem will be on the way to being solved.

5 Couch your comments in informal language (but proofread them until the pips squeak). If the author feels that you’re engaging with the text, he or she will be much more willing to respond to your comments than if you appear to be pronouncing from on high. A friendly, conversational tone helps a lot, but it’s also important to make sure your comments are well written and free of errors; you want to earn the author’s trust, after all.

6 Be honest about what you don’t know—but check the ground before you leap. If the text uses terms that are unfamiliar to you, don’t feel embarrassed about admitting it; but look up the unfamiliar terms if you can. To write ‘What’s that?’ in the margin will make the author think you’re ignorant. On the other
hand, if you write, ‘Would “preach” be more appropriate than “proselytise”?’ at least the author will know that you’ve got the drift.

7 Offer suggestions; don’t issue instructions (a rule I’ve broken in preparing these points). It’s always best to avoid couching comments as commands. ‘Would it be better to end on a positive note?’ or ‘It might be better to end on a positive note’ is far more likely to elicit an imaginative response from the author than ‘End on a positive note!’

8 Comment on the text’s strengths as well as its problems. This is partly a matter of diplomacy—it’s always easier to take critical comment mixed with praise—but there are pragmatic reasons for making sure that people know where their writing has succeeded. If they don’t, they’re likely to throw the baby out with the bathwater.

9 Set the writer a manageable task. Remember that by this stage the writer is likely to be thoroughly sick of working on the text and will need to re-engage with it to muster the energy to revise it. If there are ‘big-picture’ problems, focus on them; don’t clog your commentary up with minor details. The detailed niggles may go away when the larger problems are fixed; if they don’t, you can pick them up on a second pass.

10 Let the author know what to expect of the editing process. When you first make contact, give the author an outline of how the editing is likely to proceed—what the schedule is, when you are likely to need feedback, what extra work might be needed. Are there illustrations, tables or graphs that need to be supplied? How does the author prefer to make contact? Is he or she planning to take a holiday soon?

**Five Tips for Authors**

The author also has a responsibility to help maintain good relations with the editor. This doesn’t mean giving in on every point, but equally it should not mean resisting every suggestion for change. Here are some tips for keeping the process on an even keel.

1 Supply a clean, complete manuscript. The text should be double-spaced, spell-checked and clearly set out.
2 Don’t fiddle with the manuscript after you’ve sent it off. If you start having second thoughts, keep a list of your revisions and insert them in the edited version of the text, or see if you can send a revised version before the editor starts work. (Some of the Great Editorial Disasters of recent times have arisen from editors and authors working on different versions of their texts.) Sending piecemeal changes by email and asking the editor to insert them is also a no-no. Editors don’t like being used as typists.

3 Keep to the agreed schedule. If you run behind time, the delays are likely to snowball. The editor is probably juggling several projects at once, and yours may drift to the bottom of the pile.

4 Read the editor’s comments carefully and make a considered response. Don’t fire off a reply in anger. Even if you think the editor’s comments are stupid, they may well reflect the reactions of your future readers.

5 Think twice before you insist on restoring the original wording. If the editor has misunderstood your intention in a particular spot, check the original before you dig your heels in. It’s unlikely that the editor would have misread the text if it had been clear in the first place.

**Conclusion**

When word processors first appeared on the scene, many commentators predicted that the new machines would make editors redundant. In fact, the idea of the unedited publication has turned out to be as unrealistic as the idea of the paperless office. Writing is becoming more and more a collaborative affair. Digital technology has made it possible for people to exchange ideas rapidly, revise text seamlessly and build new kinds of writing relationships through collective effort.

Most people involved in the word trade will experience the editor–author relationship from both sides, not just once but many times over their working lives. Practices that were once jealously guarded trade secrets are increasingly an everyday necessity. In an environment of information overload, the quality of communication is more important than ever, and editing is the most effective form of quality control at our disposal. If it’s approached in a constructive spirit, the editorial process can be a great learning experience on both
sides, its end result something far better than either of the parties could have produced on their own.

Notes

Further Reading

Usage Guides and Editing Manuals

Books on Aspects of Writing

Online Resources
Bartleby.com, www.bartleby.com (English literary texts and a huge range of online references).
Journalistic Resources Page, www.markovits.com/journalism
Our Writing Lab at Purdue University, http://owl.english.purdue.edu/ (for grammar, usage and style).
Australians are the heaviest consumers, per capita, of hardcopy magazines. We also read plenty of online magazines. This means there’s a good market for magazine writing. It’s easy to dismiss magazine writing as ‘trashy’ or ‘dumbed down’ prose; writing that uses language so simple that a five year old could understand it, and colloquial slang that just doesn’t sound, well, literary. But while good magazine writing might look easy, many writers discover that making it appear this way isn’t quite so simple.

We live in an era where media writing is about more than just words. This is especially true for the magazine industry. Graphics, design and layout all work in conjunction with text to communicate a particular message. In a good magazine, images should contribute an additional layer to a story. It’s hard to imagine a piece about Britney Spears’ style (or lack thereof), for example, without a couple of pictures of her latest outfits to go with it.

In many ways this increasingly multi-textual media environment is an exciting place for writers. But it also means that we need to work twice as hard if we are to compete for the attention of audiences already bombarded with choice. Not to mention the fact that more graphics mean less room for words, which means that the words that do appear need to be exceptional—they need to be ‘word bytes’.
Tight and concise writing is a must. The ability to articulate complex facts, ideas and arguments in as few words as possible is essential. Whether you are writing for *Zoo Weekly*, *House and Garden* or *Marie Claire*, nowhere is the need for ‘word byte’ writing more apparent than in the world of glossy magazines.

There are no hard and fast rules about how to put together a magazine article. Unlike op-eds and press releases, for instance, that tend to follow a specific formula, magazine writing offers a little more room to move. There are, however, some basic guidelines you can follow to help give you an advantage in the competitive world of magazine publishing.

**Know Your Market**

As an undergraduate student I took a non-fiction writing class that involved writing a series of magazine feature articles with the ultimate aim of getting published. Although many of us managed to succeed in getting our work in print, no one had as much success as our classmate Shane.

Shane was certainly competent but he was not the most engaging or entertaining writer in the class. Technically he didn’t stand out and, for most of us at least, his work seemed uninteresting. But the outstanding quality that Shane did possess was an understanding of his target market. While the rest of us muddled away at writing some vague feature we targeted for a broadsheet, or perhaps a tabloid, or maybe even one of those women’s magazines, Shane focused on his passion—concreting. In the end Shane wrote five features about concreting, each one of them published and paid for.

A big mistake often made by new writers hoping to break into magazine writing is that they think of an idea and write a story before researching their target market. There is nothing an editor hates more than receiving an article, no matter how well-written, that is obviously unsuitable for their particular publication. For one thing, it shows that the writer probably has no real interest in the magazine to which they just sent their piece; for another, it *screams* ‘writing student’, or ‘amateur’. Professional writers do their research and target their work to a suitable audience. They can’t afford not to.

Most professional writers will tell you that they have written for a number of publications they aren’t particularly interested in reading
themselves. No matter which magazine you are writing for, media writing is always concise and to the point, with short paragraphs (no more than six lines is the general rule) and short, active and clear sentences. In other words—‘word bytes’. But there is a significant variation between the different kinds of language used in various publications. A more serious magazine such as The Bulletin is unlikely to print a piece peppered with terms such as ‘love rat’, or ‘wild partying ways’—phrases commonly used in celebrity gossip magazines such as New Weekly.

Once you have mastered the art of writing ‘word bytes’, you should also be able to tailor your work to a variety of audiences and publications. However, for writers just starting out, it is often easier, not to mention much more enjoyable, to choose a target magazine that you already know and enjoy.

It doesn’t matter how many ‘how to’ guides you look at, the best way to learn how to write is to read. So once you’ve decided on the publication for which you’d like to write, read, read and read again. It doesn’t matter if you’ve been a regular reader for years. There’s a big difference between reading as a ‘reader’ and reading as a ‘writer’. As a ‘reading writer’ you should be looking closely at the kinds of articles the magazine publishes, their length, focus and language style. Use this knowledge as a guideline when writing your own piece.

Find an Angle
Perhaps the most challenging aspect of writing a magazine article is coming up with an idea. It’s not enough to email an editor and say you’d like to write an article about celebrity socialite Nicole Ritchie. What about her? The kind of position you take will very much depend on the publication you are targeting. If you wanted to write for Cosmopolitan you might decide to write a kind of self-help piece about body image and health using Ritchie as a celebrity example of someone who has obviously struggled with body-image issues. If you were writing for a more general, serious publication like Good Weekend, however, you might decide to focus on the experience of being a privileged child of celebrities, or perhaps on a cultural analysis of the world of young Hollywood socialites.

Ideas are everywhere. Reading a publication regularly can help to generate ideas because there is no greater form of inspiration than
communicating with other people, whether it be in person or through writing. Perhaps you have noticed a cultural trend that’s affecting your group of friends or family, or you’ve seen something online that’s particularly interesting. Whatever you decide, magazine writing is about choice. Magazine articles are usually quite short—2000 words is a reasonably long feature—which means you simply don’t have room to say everything. You must decide on a target market and a focus before you start writing. This decision will impact on everything from the language you use (formal, personal, first person, third person) to the word length and the kind of information you include.

The idea for my *Marie Claire* article, ‘What Are Your Neighbours Up To?’ (Appendix 7) came to me while I was working on another assignment. The assignment involved a photo shoot in an ordinary suburban Melbourne house owned by a contact at the magazine. The home owners were quite friendly and offered to give me a tour of the house while we were waiting for the photographer to set up his equipment. Everything appeared quite normal until I was shown a room between the lounge and the kitchen. ‘This is our S&M dungeon’, said the proud home owner, pointing to a room filled will an array of whips, chains, handcuffs and other delights. It got me thinking—how does anyone really know what’s going on behind closed doors in their seemingly innocent suburban street?

Ultimately you should be able to sum up the crux of your article in one or two snappy sentences. If you can do this before you start writing you are off to a head start and the writing process shouldn’t be too difficult. Realistically, this isn’t possible all of the time. Sometimes you will need to start writing before you figure out what it is that you really want to say. This is okay too. That’s what redrafting is for!

**Research**
Being a magazine writer is not dissimilar to playing detective. Your job is to source information and compile it in a way that creates an interesting, engaging and focused piece of writing. There are a number of ways you can go about researching your story, depending on the kind of piece you are writing and for whom you are writing it.
**Interviewing**

Interviewing is a great way to source information that’s fresh and new. Whether you conduct the interview over the phone, in person, or even via email, the most important thing is to be prepared. Make sure you first find out a bit about the person you are interviewing, or if you are writing about a broader issue and are interested in your subject’s experiences, do some reading so you are able to prepare relevant and interesting questions.

While you should never turn up to an interview without a list of questions, this doesn't mean you should read them out and have your subject answer them one-by-one. An interview should be more like a structured yet informal conversation rather than a question and answer situation. It is important to try and find a balance that allows your interviewee to speak freely, but at the same time enables you to guide the conversation. Some small talk can make the situation seem more relaxed and ‘normal’ but there is no point listening to someone rant non-stop about their passion for ferret breeding when you are more interested in finding out about their experience with adultery.

You can take notes during an interview but make sure that, with the permission of your interviewee, you also record the conversation. That way you always have proof that your quotes are legitimate.

**The Internet**

The information society has changed the face of journalistic research forever. Never before have writers had access to such a wide range of individuals and experiences across the globe. Use it properly and the Internet can be a never ending source of inspiration and contacts.

**Family and Friends**

Never underestimate the usefulness of family and friends when it comes to finding stories. You never know who knows whom, and these people can be a fantastic and untapped source of information and potential story ideas.

**The Media**

Make sure you keep up to date with print and electronic media that interests you. This is a great way to get an idea of what editors are interested in publishing, and also what audiences consider relevant.
**Getting Published**

Aspiring writers are often told there is no point writing up a story unless you have already pitched the idea to an editor who responded with interest. This makes sense for an experienced writer whose work an editor is already familiar with. But how does an editor know that this inexperienced writer with a great idea can actually write?

A focused, well-written story that suits the publication for which it’s aiming makes for a powerful business card. Editors are always looking for fresh new voices who understand their publication and can also write. Editors don’t lie to protect writers’ feelings. If they reject your story but tell you that they like your style and want to see more of your work, they mean it. Don’t waste this opportunity. Now that an editor is familiar with your work you can start to pitch ideas.

**The Pitch**

Pitching ideas can be done via email or over the phone. There are advantages and disadvantages to both methods. Whichever way you decide to go, keep the pitch short and simple. It should only be a couple of sentences that sum up your idea in a catchy and interesting way—a ‘word byte’ in itself. The piece about suburban subversives, for example, was quite an easy one to pitch because I had a very clear angle from the very beginning: what are your neighbours really up to?

Phone pitching is a much more personal and direct method than email. If you manage to get through to an editor, you can find out there and then if they’ll be interested in your work. This experience can also be intensely nerve wracking and intimidating. Make sure you have your pitch written down and ready to go so that you can relay your idea quickly and clearly.

Email pitching, on the other hand, gives you more time to mull over your idea and perfect the ‘word bytes’. It can also be an effective way to reach an editor who might not be answering his or her phone. The main disadvantage is that emails are easy to ignore. Or delete. And they can easily be missed by a busy editor whose inbox is already inundated with messages. If you do decide to pitch this way, use the subject line of your message to grab an editor’s attention with a snappy ‘word byte’ headline that makes your idea sound interesting and suitable for their publication.
Your email pitch might look something like this:

Feature idea: What are your neighbours really up to? Uncovering the strange underbelly of suburbia.

Dear editor,

I think my feature, ‘What Are Your Neighbours Really Up To’? would be perfect for your magazine. The article will involve a series of first person accounts of people who live in the midst of suburbia, yet whose life behind closed doors is far from ‘normal’. I plan to interview a couple who have over 200 snakes living in their backyard, a man with Jesus paraphernalia decorating his front yard, a man who likes to dress up in animal costumes, and another man who made a suit of armour out of teaspoons.

Please feel free to contact me on this email or on 1234 567 891.

I look forward to hearing from you.

Regards,

Jane Smith

The Brief
If you have a piece commissioned by a magazine editor, you will often be given a ‘brief’ which outlines all the requirements your piece needs to cover. A brief will usually tell you things like the deadline (very important—your work should never, ever be late), word count, the style, the angle, whom to interview, the types of questions to ask and the section of the magazine in which your piece will eventually appear. Editors create briefs for a reason. They have a vision for their publication and they expect their writers to respect this. Besides, in many ways, the more information a brief includes, the easier it is for the writer—a good brief takes away some hard work!
Putting It All Together: Be Professional

You’ve read *Word Bytes* back to front. You know all about choosing ‘muscular’ verbs and the most interesting characters and actions, and about the importance of maintaining a balance between showing and telling. You would never allow a ‘flabby’ sentence past the first draft, and you can sum up your story idea in a couple of catchy sentences. As for the publication you’re planning to publish in? You’ve read every sentence so many times you can practically recite them.

Just remember:

- *Always* stick to deadlines, word counts and style guides.
- Be realistic. Don’t ever promise to write a story you know you won’t be able to deliver.
- There is no need to ‘dumb down’ your writing, but make sure you are clear and concise.
- Have fun—magazine writing can provide an opportunity to enter worlds most people don’t get a chance to see. Make the most of it.

Further Reading


Readers will usually become engrossed in a piece of writing if, very early on, they can identify in some way with either the writer or narrator, or with the topic under discussion. They will become especially absorbed if they are transported out of their ordinary, everyday lives, if they are taken to a different place. Everyone loves to travel, but many people like to do it vicariously—without leaving home. It’s not easy to move people around the planet, or even around their own country, simply by using words: getting them to feel sand between their toes on a beach in Western Australia, a salt-flavoured breeze in their face in New Caledonia; or to visualise clearly the ‘haphazard piles of rubble’, or the ‘porridgy concrete buildings’ that ‘sag into the ground like elderly men on life support machines’ in Baghdad in the final weeks of Saddam Hussein’s regime, as described by Johann Hari.

Published travel writing has been chosen by its editors because of its ability to perform just such feats. It is a form of identification between writers and readers; it’s about getting your readers to be positioned behind your eyes, or just over your shoulder.

For a communications professional, this skill is to die for. It will enable us to write speeches for politicians, CEOs or company presidents that will maximise the desired effect; it will enable us to write articles for print or online media that will keep readers coming back.
for more. For those of us wanting to learn to create ‘word bytes’—to which a maximum number of people will tune in, travel writing is an excellent skill workout.

A published or publishable piece of travel prose is not a ‘what I did on my holiday’ piece. Nor is it a travel advertisement. These do often appear in the media in the guise of travel articles, but then must carry the label ‘advertisement’. Travel advertisements share similar features to travel articles, otherwise no one would read them; but their views are necessarily less impartial than in actual travel articles. In between are the articles written as a result of the writer being given a free flight to Dubai, or a cruise on a luxury liner, or a stay at a new bush getaway. But in terms of engaging and keeping readers, they all have and display what I call the ‘word byte’ factor.

**General Principles of Published Travel Pieces**

**Focus**

Travel pieces will often focus on a particular facet of a destination; so, for example, instead of focusing on the whole city of Paris, a travel writer might examine the most interesting museums in the city. Narrowly focused pieces that have appeared in print media over the past few years include the following: a historical stone wall in western Victoria; a particular hot spring in Japan; an unpleasant town in the UK that doesn't welcome visitors; a sumptuous new hotel on the outskirts of Melbourne; a particularly appealing coffee shop in Singapore, and so on. A published travel piece is rarely about ‘London’ or ‘Tokyo’ or ‘Paris’; it is much more specific than that. One of my recent travel articles, for the online travel magazine Bonjour Paris, was about Australians having Christmas dinner in the French gastronomic city of Lyon.

**Starting in the Middle of the Action**

Nearly all travel articles open in the middle of the action, *in medias res*, as we have seen with several other genres of writing discussed in this book. The author is right there, seeing, hearing, smelling and experiencing all aspects of the scene, and it is these details that have the power to draw the reader in too. In this, travel articles are similar to personal narrative articles, covered in Chapter 3.
A good example of starting *in medias res*, and appealing to readers’ aural senses, by using a ‘sound byte’—a line or two of relevant dialogue, is demonstrated in Tori Cavanagh’s travel article on Morocco, reprinted in Appendix 8:

‘*Pardonnez-moi*, you want me to take them off?’

‘*Oui oui*, clothes off. *Je t’aide*. Leave undies on if you want.’

It’s not every day I find myself being told to expose my stark white flesh to a room full of Moroccan strangers. As I was undressing and attempting to cover my chest simultaneously, I had *that* talk with myself; *c’mon, it’s all part of the experience, just copy the others and act like this is a normal bath for you.*

**Using the Pronoun ‘I’**

Although you need to insert yourself into a travel piece—so that you can be the reader’s eyes and ears, try not to do it too much, especially in the first couple of paragraphs. Your focus is your surroundings and experiences, not yourself, even though all the impressions will of course be filtered through your eyes. Tori Cavanagh’s article above is an exception to this because it is the discomfort of the ‘I’ character that is important to the piece, and important to pull readers in. Published in an Australian newspaper, this piece tells of a cultural experience, a Moroccan *hammam* or communal bath, with which most readers will be unfamiliar, but about which they will probably be curious.

**Dialogue**

As with Tori’s article, starting with a line of dialogue, if it suits your piece, is often a great ‘word byte’, because people generally love reading dialogue; it’s about humans interacting, and so it draws readers in. But make sure the dialogue is always there for a purpose: to give information about a character or place. A line of dialogue also needs to be entertaining. Some are intended to evoke laughs, such as the following example:
'You want piss, Mr Mark?' asks Sahadev, my Nepalese rafting guide. I am just framing a suitable reply when he adds: ‘You want piss for eat tonight?’

‘Ah, fish!’ I say, climbing gingerly from the bright orange rubber ducky. ‘Yes, fish would be an excellent idea.’

Since Sahadev has picked up his English mostly from Indian taxi drivers, such linguistic bloopers are understandable … (Chipperfield)

A line of dialogue at the start can function as the ‘hook’ of the article, a line that will intrigue readers and induce them to read on to find out what happens. So by default it needs to be a ‘word byte’, perfectly crafted as well as full of drama and interest. The following two examples are of this type:

‘So has anyone ever died abseiling here?’ asks Nicholas, my 10-year-old son. (Hay)

‘When the protests in Tiananmen Square happened, my parents told me I could stay for only three hours, otherwise I would no longer be their son.’

The Chinese tour guide pauses and looks around the clean-swept expanse now dotted with tourists taking happy snaps. (Suiter)

The Senses—Other than Sight
Travel pieces often begin with a line that appeals to one of the five senses. The following example blends an appeal to both smell and sight:

She sits with the sun behind her, smelling of patchouli and studying the cards on the table between us. (Shelton)

It is often the sense of hearing that is invoked in the first lines of published travel pieces. So when you are researching a place, or

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thinking back over a trip you have made, try to remember the sounds you heard there. Here are two examples:

Hindi film music blaring, horn honking, light flashing, the auto-rickshaw announces its arrival. (Rice)

The chant of a priest pierces the air on a Good Friday eve. Athens is grinding to a halt as churches beckon believers to evening prayer. I clamber up the southern slope of the Acropolis to view a procession. (French)

**Verb Tenses**

Present tense should generally be used throughout a travel piece as it gives a greater sense of immediacy, helping readers to feel they are really there, experiencing everything. You might, however, need to use the past tense if you are going to describe the history of something, or a previous visit to the place.

**Language Style**

Try to really stretch your vocabulary by using interesting and hard-working nouns and verbs. This does not mean ‘overwriting’ by using obscure words in the hope of sounding clever. You may indeed sound clever—too clever by half for many of your busy, overstimulated readers, whose attention will then wander, only to be quickly hooked by the next ‘word byte’ vying for their attention.

By hard-working or ‘muscular’ verbs, I mean verbs that are not the ones you would automatically first choose; verbs that have greater resonance than the ordinary, everyday verbs that always come to mind first, but which nevertheless are easily understandable by most readers. For example: ‘The chant of a priest pierces the air on Good Friday eve.’ (‘Candle Power’ by Alyssa French, in Appendix 9)

Our automatic choice of verb here, for the priest’s chant, would probably be ‘rings out’ or ‘sounds’. But if we stop and question our first choice of verbs in sentences, and try to find something more interesting and evocative, we will produce much more powerful writing, as the author of this piece has. ‘Pierces’ conveys the same meaning as ‘rings out’ or ‘sounds’, but in a more vivid and resonant way.
Inexperienced writers often seek to make their sentences more interesting by adding adverbs. In that case, we would have: ‘The chant of a priest rings out piercingly …’ But to use ‘pierce’ as the verb rather than the adverb is much more powerful. Similarly: ‘I clamber up the southern slope of the Acropolis’ is more arresting than ‘I climb up slowly …’ and so on. In ‘word byte’ writing, less is almost always more, and this is even more the case in this media age.

Writing that has the ability to attract and keep many readers tends to be very sparing in its use of adjectives and adverbs. Have a look at the first draft of Alyssa French’s article, and see how many adjectives were cut by the editor. They simply weren’t needed by the hard-working, evocative nouns and verbs that she chose.

We also see short sentences, and medium-length sentences for variety (short is one line in length, medium is two). We do not see many long ones. Studies of readability have shown that the number of words in a sentence is a key factor in reader-friendliness. Make sure your sentences do not go over 20–25 words, with many of your sentences having fewer words than this.

Short paragraphs (no more than five lines) are also much more reader-friendly than long ones. Sometimes a one-line paragraph can be used for maximising ‘word byte’ effect; and even one-word sentences. But don’t use more than one or two of these per page or their novelty effect will become nullified by overuse.

The maximum length of most general-interest prose pieces, including travel articles, in the media is about 750 words. Travel pieces can be longer, in a newspaper such as *The Australian*, but in the tabloid newspapers they are about 350 words. A length of 750 words demands great concision, 350 words even more so. Every word on the page must justify its inclusion.

**Structure**

Experienced travel writer Nadine Cresswell-Myatt says she tries to structure each of her travel pieces as a journey:

The first entry point is of course your lead—your first line and first paragraph. It needs to beckon the reader to come on the journey. Give some thought to the best way of doing
this. Analyse the leads of published pieces. What do they have in common?

Many leads start with anecdotes—little word pictures that make a point for you, and lure the reader in. Details help a reader see a story, and for this you should use strong nouns, also proper nouns, such as the names of streets, the brand of beer and so on. Quotes or dialogue are always good as a lead.

Here is a gripping lead, about a special sort of bus trip in London, from one of Cresswell-Myatt’s published travel pieces:

‘This is the bus trip to Murder,’ said our guide with a chuckle that would have made a ghost grow pale. ‘Any of you guvnors think you’re ‘eading for ’atfield ’ouse and an Elizabethan banquet are in for a nasty surprise.’

Here are some more examples of snappy ‘word byte’ leads:

Nudity I don’t have a problem with, but this is ridiculous. This bloke reminds me of the scene in The Full Monty when the would-be male stripper nicknamed Horse dropped his daks. (McMahon)

Nobody knows why the Turkish merchant murdered his sweetheart. All they know is he wore a turban. (Deverell)

According to Cresswell-Myatt:
to make your reader aware of your angle, the direction you will be taking. For example, your destination might be London, but your angle is sites relating only to Jack the Ripper, say, or Charles Dickens.

Try to think of your angle before you start writing, and actually write it up as one sentence, and put it at the top in capitals to keep reminding yourself. Then, as you make decisions about what to include, you should refer back to this one sentence to guide you in what to put in and what to leave out. Delete it once you’ve finished the piece, of course.

In the middle of your travel piece will be solid information, but not delivered in big, boring slabs. ‘Lead your reader by the hand, with language that they can’t put down’, says Cresswell-Myatt. This is where you can use anecdotes if you feel they are appropriate, or else this might be the place for the deft descriptions, for showing us, not so much telling us, the evocative and important details. ‘Then, with the ending, you need to satisfy the reader. On a real journey, you often take something memorable away with you—souvenirs, photos. Similarly, in a travel piece, you attempt to leave the reader with some significant and lasting impression at the end’, says Cresswell-Myatt.

**Sidebars**

In examining published travel pieces in the print media, you will have noticed a little box set aside from the main article. ‘This is called a “sidebar”, and includes factual points, such as how to get there, costs, and other details. Each publication has its own style for these’, says Cresswell-Myatt.

If you are hoping to hone your travel writing sufficiently to send pieces off to a newspaper or magazine then you should study the different types of sidebars accompanying travel articles, and emulate these according to the publication for which you are aiming.

**Details or ‘Local Colour’**

If you provide the most evocative details of the location in which your travel piece is set, you will maximise your chances of getting your readers to feel they are standing in your shoes, seeing and hearing all
the experiences that you are describing. Read the published travel pieces that appear weekly in most newspapers to gain an idea of the types of details that travel writers select.

Nadine Cresswell-Myatt gives the following advice:

The short length of the travel piece means that you must try to find words to provide flashes of colour and fleeting sensations rather than trying to give a dense overall picture. It’s a bit like using a video camera to pan for an overview of a place, then focusing in to highlight a few significant details.

Make sure that the details you include are not tired old descriptions of the well-worn travel destinations. If you want to write about a well-known destination, think of a new and different angle. For example, one of my travel pieces was on Koroit. Just a country town in Victoria, you might think; but apparently Koroit is the most Irish place in Australia, and they hold an Irish Festival there.

So my piece dealt with the heritage buildings in the town, and how this area was first settled by Irish families escaping the Irish Potato Famine in the 1840s.

Cresswell-Myatt also notes that because, in the information society, different media forms cross-fertilise or feed on each other, ‘a successful film set in a particular place spawns not only tourism to that place, but also travel writing on it. Braveheart did this for Scotland. When the film The Beach first came out, one travel piece claimed to be about that particular beach in Thailand.’ I am expecting to see a renewed interest in the Flemish town of Bruges in Belgium reflected in the travel pages any day now, thanks to the 2008 film, starring Colin Farrell, In Bruges.

Peter Mayle’s books about Tuscany have also resulted in media cross-fertilisation. As well as regenerating enthusiasm for travel to Tuscany, Mayle’s books have increased demand for travel writing on that region. The same thing happened with New Zealand as a result of The Lord of the Rings films being made there.
**Timeliness**

‘Whenever possible, travel writing is timely,’ says Cresswell-Myatt. ‘So you will often see a published piece that “hangs” on a particular occasion or date: for example, St Valentine’s Day in Paris, or St Patrick’s Day in Dublin. Readers are also drawn in by various anniversaries of events.’ An example of this is the stories on the Spencer family’s ancestral home in Northamptonshire, England, that have been published in newspapers on the fifth and tenth anniversaries of Princess Diana’s death in Paris in 1997.

On September 11th some years we see articles to commemorate the World Trade Center bombings. So far there have been pieces published in many media forms and genres, including travel writing, all of which deal with some aspect of the tragedy. On the first anniversary one man wrote about a visit that had occurred prior to the bombing, and then contrasted this with a visit made 12 months after it.

**Your Angle**

‘Think local, instead of global’, advises Cresswell-Myatt to beginning travel writers.

You don’t have to be a world traveller to give your writing skills a travel-writing ‘workout’. Exactly the same skills need to be developed to write evocatively about St Kilda as about St Tropez; about Balwyn as about Bangkok. The task may indeed be more manageable for you if you think local, instead of global.

‘But if you do want to write about an international destination’, says Cresswell-Myatt, ‘then try to think of a new angle—the things the guidebooks don’t tell you.’ Tori’s piece on Morocco in Appendix 8 is a good example of this.

You don’t necessarily have to experience first-hand absolutely everything before converting it into travel writing. Cresswell-Myatt tells how she wrote a piece for the Melbourne *Herald Sun* on tourist accommodation in English castles. ‘I actually stayed in only one such castle,’ she says, ‘but then, using the internet, I found quite a few castles around England that take paying guests. I then wrote my piece on four different castles, emailing those I hadn’t visited in order to check the facts, and to obtain digital images of some of the castles.’
Cresswell-Myatt adds that the ability to source or take photographs is integral to travel writing that is aimed for publication. If you want to develop this skill, study the images that accompany published travel pieces, taking note of the types of content and the composition of the pictures. Some travel writers have a friend or colleague take pictures for them, others source them from the destination itself or from the internet, while others develop their own photographic skills.

Planning the Piece
Travel writing does not have to be quite so rigidly structured as other media pieces such as op-eds or book reviews, but this doesn't mean that it requires no planning or organisation.

‘When you have thought of your angle’, says Cresswell-Myatt, ‘it is very useful to write it up as a sentence to guide you in your writing; for example: “Look at sites around London that have connections with Princess Diana.” Or: “Tell of the best places in KL to buy CDs, DVDs, and clothes for a person passing through for one to two days.”

Once you have your angle, make random notes of everything you want to include. This is called brainstorming—a list of things that you could possibly include in your article. When you are compiling this list, try not to make value-judgements, just put down all ideas that come into your head, no matter how wild and unlikely they may seem.

When you’ve done this, try to number these items on your list in order of interest or importance. Then go back and, starting at number one, write down a few notes next to each point to guide you when you come to write the word pictures. Review the notes you have written, and try to imagine which set of notes will make the most arresting word picture, preferably one that you can render by appealing to a sense other than sight.

With this ‘word byte’ firmly in your head, write your lead. Continue creating the word pictures, weaving in the solid information, historical facts, how to get there and so on.

Editing
I have always found it best to do several separate edits, looking at different aspects each time.
First edit: does this sound like a ‘my holiday’ piece? You could read it aloud to an honest friend to gauge this. If it does sound like this, spend some time reading and analysing published travel pieces in the print media. Most newspapers publish their travel sections on the weekend, and some on Fridays as well. Try to work out the difference between your piece and the published ones. Then re-write.

Try to keep yourself in the background. Focus on the details, not on yourself. You are the cipher, the rhetorical medium, as it were, between the place and your reader. Your objective is to become the eyes, ears and nose of your reader. So your writing must be sufficiently ego-less (or ego-lite) that there is room for another ego to get in behind your eyes. If your ego looms too large in your writing, other egos may not want to go there! This is pretty much the case for all media writing, but it seems particularly the case with travel writing, where the main aim is to take our readers to a completely different place.

Says Cresswell-Myatt: ‘A good rule of thumb about using the pronoun “I” is to ask yourself: does it further the story? If not, you are just being self-indulgent.’

Second edit: look at the structure of your piece—are all the paragraphs in the best order for logic? the best order for interest? the best order for flow of information? the best order for linguistic flow?

Third edit: have you painted enough word pictures? Have you told us things or shown us things? Do you understand the difference? (If not, go back and read the section on Showing and Telling in Chapter 3.)

Fourth edit: underline every adjective and adverb; then try to change the noun or verb that they are describing into a better noun or verb, as I demonstrated above with the piece on Athens.

Fifth edit: have you relied too much on the sense of sight? Could you re-work some of the word pictures to evoke the other senses?

**Brevity**

Inexperienced writers often make the mistake of thinking that if a piece of writing is relatively short they can write it in a shorter time. The reverse is true. To create a short piece with optimum reader-friendliness actually takes longer than it does to write a 3000-word essay.
‘Brevity takes time’, says Cresswell-Myatt, ‘because you have to make sure that each word counts.’

For writing in the information society, excess words are like excess baggage: they weigh readers down so that they will simply abandon your piece and go on to the next one. I like the analogy of packing when you go on holiday, because that’s what you are doing with powerful prose—packing words in tightly. The savvy traveller packs a suitcase but then chucks out half. The clever writer does the same with words, tightening, adjusting, packing it all in neatly—without a wrinkle or bulge in sight.

**Do and Don’t Do the Following**

Lastly, says Cresswell-Myatt, ‘*Don’t* write as if you were writing a postcard.’ Adjectives like beautiful, magnificent, fantastic, amazing, and so on, may be okay for postcards, but they are useless in prose that you want others to read and enjoy. Everyone has heard these words so many times that they slip in and out of our heads, taking no foothold, creating no word-pictures. They are the exact opposite of ‘word bytes’.

‘*Don’t* sound like a hackneyed travel brochure. So *no* golden sand fringed with swaying palm trees.’ You can of course talk about sand and palm trees if you can find a way to do it that is new and exciting, not clichéd.

*Do* read the latest examples of travel writing: each metropolitan newspaper—both tabloid and broadsheet—have travel sections as least once a week. In Melbourne, the *Herald Sun* has a travel section on Fridays. There is also one in Saturday and Sunday’s *Age*; there is a large travel section in the national *Weekend Australian*.

The articles in these sections are written mostly by well-established freelance writers, but there are often some written by new writers. Both the travel articles reprinted in Appendices 8 and 9 were ‘firsts’ for their authors. All the travel editors are sent so many freelance articles that they publish only the very small percentage of pieces that grip them sufficiently and make them read through to the end. Those writers who get published are doing something right.
Their work is full of ‘word bytes’. Read their pieces. See how they take you to other places.

**Further Reading**


**Notes**

1 Hari.
When you are arguing for something, as well as ‘word bytes’ you need a very specific structure. Arguing comes in many forms—for example, when you are attempting to get a committee or group of people to adopt a policy or procedure that you believe should be adopted; in some business letters; in the recommendations section of a report, in which you want to argue for certain action; in media articles and in some types of media releases.

The best place to find examples of this kind of argumentative writing is on what is known as the Opinion or Comments page of a newspaper. Called in the industry, the ‘op-ed page’, it often publishes writing from a wide range of people from outside the newspaper, representing (although not in equal proportion) many sections of the newspaper’s target audience. This page also features op-eds from the newspaper’s senior writers, and as well it reprints pieces from high-quality international newspapers. In the online newspapers, the section is termed similarly—*The Age*, *The Sydney Morning Herald*, the *Herald Sun* and *The Australian* all call their op-ed sections Opinion, while the UK *Guardian* calls it Comment. Usually, all the op-eds that appear in the hardcopy newspapers also appear in the online editions.

As well, some online Opinion or Comment sections now feature sub-sections publishing far more op-eds than the three or four per
day in the paper version, with new ones uploaded frequently, because space on the web is of course unlimited! *The Sydney Morning Herald* has a sub-section of its online Opinion section called ‘The Heckler’. The *Guardian*’s sub-section is called ‘Comment is free’, a phrase taken from a famous article written by *Guardian* editor C. P. Scott in 1921, in which he wrote the wonderfully long-lasting ‘word byte’— ’Comment is free, but facts are sacred.’ The writers contributing to this section in the *Guardian* are mostly from outside the newspaper, but seem to be people of some standing in the community—authors, academics, executives, activists, community leaders of one sort or another. Contributors to ‘The Heckler’ seem to be ordinary citizens—that is, non-journalists who can simply write well.

In the hardcopy format, most op-ed pages are opposite the letters page. Next to the letters are usually found the editorials written by in-house staff, usually senior editors. These are similar to op-eds in structure, but because they are written anonymously, they lack that direct connection between reader and writer that the op-ed is so good at constructing. In many ways, the op-ed is a sort of hybrid that has emerged from the pure personal opinion of the much shorter newspaper letter, and the dry ‘objective’ anonymous argument of the editorial. The op-ed can teach us much about how to construct a logical, well-supported argument that will engage and persuade its audience.

In common with literary/narrative journalism, the op-ed also has its roots in the ‘New Journalism’ of the 1960s. In the New Journalism there was not really a distinction between pieces that focused on a story, and pieces that focused on an argument. Often, these two elements were blended. And sometimes they are today too. But the majority of op-ed articles have strongly focused arguments, rather than literary/narrative or ‘story’ elements. For those of us wanting to learn a number of ways of writing powerfully and engaging readers, it is useful to learn to produce both types of writing, and to understand how the different devices can work their magic on audiences in different ways.

In a successful op-ed, the ‘magic’ is that it can change people’s minds. And this is really the overt aim of the op-ed, and of any similarly hard-hitting, succinct piece that is logically argued: to help people arrive at a certain opinion, to strengthen points of view people
already hold, or to change people's minds. Op-eds link in with topical issues and with the rest of the contents of the newspaper, and help readers to confront the issues involved and understand them better. At their best, op-ed pieces can resemble one half of a short, intelligent, and insightful discussion—usually on a current or topical issue—with a person who is an authority on (and/or has researched thoroughly) a particular topic.

As with literary/narrative pieces, any piece of writing that engages readers emotionally right from the start has a better chance of being read right through until the end. Op-eds offer less scope for overt emotional engagement than literary/narrative essays. Nevertheless, most published op-eds do use various literary/narrative devices in their leads, or beginnings, to try and maximise emotional engagement. But after the lead, they tend not to continue with these overt devices, and instead focus on other features: a tight argumentative structure; short sentences; and the extending of readers' acceptance from first premise to conclusion, using a pattern of rhetorical linking.

These devices, when used optimally, are capable of fulfilling the aim of affecting readers to the extent of strengthening or changing their opinions. Below I suggest ways of generating material for an op-ed, strategies which can be followed to assist you in writing your own article of this type.

**Powerful Devices of Op-eds**

**Beginnings**

The beginning of any piece of prose is the most crucial part. It is the writer's handshake with readers: the first, best and possibly the only chance to impress readers. From this first sentence, or several sentences, readers will decide whether they wish to continue reading. This is also the main chance to connect with readers emotionally. Once connected, the reader is more likely to read on.

In newspaper writing, the introductory paragraph (usually one to three sentences) is called the 'lead'. On page 75 of *The Daily Miracle: an Introduction to Journalism*, David Conley says that 'if the reporter does not grab the reader with the first sentence, there is no need to write a second.' Whether you are writing an argument to
present at a meeting, a ‘discussion’ article for an in-house newsletter, a press release that presents a certain strong view from your organisation, or an actual op-ed, if you want your readers to read on, your lead is the most important part—it must function as a ‘word byte’, and grab and hold its reader at first glance. This is the case for writing across most media where you are required to work hard to earn your audience’s attention, rather than having a captive audience.

One way in which op-ed writers construct their leads is by using narrative (or ‘storylike’) devices, which I discussed in Chapter 2. The storylike opening will certainly maximise emotional engagement: that is, it will invoke what I call the pathos factor, as it will enable the reader to connect emotionally with the piece by being pulled into the scene, and seeing it anew—usually through the eyes of another.

These storylike devices do not generally continue all the way through the op-ed. They are used at the beginning to engage readers, to pull them in to the piece. After this an op-ed will usually revert to a ‘drier’, more traditional argumentative style (although often still with an ‘I’ situated within the piece); but if the reader has been sufficiently engaged by the ‘story-like’ beginning, and if the argument is strong, well-supported and flowing, the chances of keeping the reader reading are maximised. To keep the storylike devices throughout the piece might suggest to readers that this is not a ‘serious’ or ‘true’ argument. Some of the different types of narrative or storylike beginnings are shown below.

As Mafia queen Dung Ha lazed in front of her modest hotel, sharing a midnight beer with several other women, the hit man appeared from the dark. He pulled a pistol and shot her in the head. Then he slipped back into the shadows. (‘Gang Boss’s Trial Exposes Corruption in Vietnam’, by Alan Sipres)

Sipres’ passage above starts in the middle of an actual depicted scene, showing action.

‘Were people bad or good in the olden days?’ my small grandson asked me in a worried voice, the other day. (‘It’s Simple: Strive for a Better World’, by Pamela Bone)
This passage by Pamela Bone starts in the middle of an actual depicted scene, using dialogue.

As the second Gulf war begins, we peer through the sandstorm, straining to discern the outline of the new world beyond. (‘Beyond the Sandstorm’, by Timothy Garton Ash)

On the dreadful nights leading up to war the moon grew larger, brighter and more useful to the invaders. Never has moonlight on the bush and the paddocks, normally so beautiful, seemed as ominous and tragic; and so unlike itself, having now been conscripted into the service of man’s inhumanity to man. (‘Reflections on the War Moon: Leunig’s Diary’, by Michael Leunig)

The tone of the two pieces above suggests a grand epic—a tale of dramatic events and heroism in faraway places.

‘So, welcome Mr Khalid Sheikh Mohammed, military commander of al-Qaeda, and the world’s most wanted fugitive, to the Hotel California.’ (‘He Thinks We’re Scum, but Torturing Him Is Still Wrong’, by Rod Liddle)

Liddle’s dramatic monologue above employs a well-known fictional device, in which a narrator is speaking to another character directly; this can have the effect of positioning the reader in the shoes of the person being spoken to.

Dear Prime Minister, speaking as one of the mob, I’ve had enough. (‘Here’s the Ultimate Dear John letter’, by Hugh Mackay)

Hugh Mackay’s article takes the form of a letter, a device often used in fictional stories. In op-eds, this device can lend a tone of sarcasm, or humour, generally producing an engaging effect for readers.

In my high school music appreciation class, we listened to Tchaikovsky’s 1812 overture. (‘When You Open the Door of
War, Who Knows What Will Emerge’, by Margaret Atwood, novelist

Atwood positions the writer within the narrative. This is not usually done immediately with the ‘I’, which is used sparingly throughout, but more often with the use of the ‘we’ (as in most of the other beginnings here).

For the past year or so, a close mate and I have upheld a commitment to the regular get-togethers we now refer to as ‘man time’. These occasions usually involve a meal, a drink and a movie. (‘Man Time: an Honest Chat with Mates May Ease Your Problems’, in Suicide: Men at Risk series, by Tim Pegler)

In Pegler’s article above, the ‘I’ pronoun works to good effect, with the writer starting off by being positioned within the narrative.

Another powerful way to begin is using words that convey the passion of the writer for his or her subject. This has long been used in non-fiction too, but the ‘anonymous’ editorials and hard news stories tend not to use it much as they still write according to the newspaper style of prose which requires them to appear ‘objective’. When the writer begins by clearly showing his or her passion for a particular side of an issue, this is a direct appeal to pathos. Notice that the ‘I’ exists in these leads as an unstated but nevertheless powerful persona, without the actual pronoun ‘I’ being used. The following two pieces make a direct appeal to readers’ emotions by stressing the ‘I’ characters’ personal feelings on the issue:

So they have done it. In the face of hostile world opinion—and in John Howard’s case, furious domestic opposition to this George-Bush inspired war on Iraq—they have gone ahead and done it. (‘Be Appalled, but Not Surprised’, by Hugh Mackay)

Sometimes lately it’s been hard to stop from gagging when being served up yet another supposedly incontrovertible lesson in history proving that Saddam Hussein is
an updated Hitler or Castro or that the United Nations is the League of Nations Mark II. (‘Where Will It All End?’, by Shaun Carney)

A common beginning style is to use a straight, non-fiction style of prose, but to use very spare, active-sounding, subject-verb-object sentences, with carefully chosen characters, and interesting verbs. This is often combined (as in the case with the first two of the following examples) with a slight colloquial tone, which could convey the impression that this is a discussion among friends.

We’ve got a great health care system in Australia. (‘Let’s Save This Fair, Affordable Health Care’, by Adele Horin)

John Howard wants to fudge the present and Bob Hawke wants to rewrite the past. (‘The Hawke Ascendancy and the Wing-Clipping’, by Alan Ramsay)

As the first bombs of Gulf War II fell yesterday, an emotional John Howard recognised he was presiding over an Australia still deeply divided over his decision to commit troops to war. (‘Uniting Australia, the PM’s Greatest Challenge’, by Louise Dodson)

Sentence Lengths and Verb Positions
Studies of prose readability have shown that the number of words in a sentence is a key factor in keeping readers reading. For the sentences in the first paragraph, 30 words per sentence should be your absolute maximum, but in general try to keep most sentences under 25 words. Remember: writing that has the widest appeal is prose with short, varied sentence lengths. So, some sentences will have five words, some ten, with your longest being up to 25 words long.

Always try to get your reader to the verb quickly, using a character + action ‘storytelling’ sentence structure (as discussed in Chapter 3). But if you can't always get your reader to the verb quickly, make sure you choose the best possible character to maximise the ‘storytelling’ effect. That is, choose characters who are the agents of the main action that his happening in your sentence. This does not
always have to be a human being; indeed sometimes, there may be good reason not to choose a human being.

For example, in the third excerpt above, ‘As the first bombs of Gulf War II fell yesterday …’, the character chosen for the first part of the sentence is the ‘first bombs of Gulf War II’. Now this first part of the sentence is a dependent clause, and not the main action of the sentence, which is about John Howard and what he is feeling and recognising. The writer could have chosen instead, ‘As the bomber pilots dropped the first bombs of Gulf War II yesterday …’ But this would focus readers on the pilots so that we are expecting the story to be about them. In this case the character of the main clause of the sentence is the head of a government, and so it is important that the character of the dependent clause does not lead us away from the character of the main clause—John Howard.

The first verb in the sentence, ‘fell’, does not appear until the ninth word. But because the first character ‘the first bombs of Gulf War II’ is sufficiently dramatic and arresting, readers can cope with reading eight words before they get to the first piece of action. The second part of the sentence, the main clause, begins with its character, ‘an emotional John Howard’, followed immediately by his main action ‘recognised’. It is the ‘storytelling’ style of this sentence, with characters very carefully chosen so that they ‘match’, with their main actions following immediately, that makes a long sentence of 32 words very readable. If you must write sentences of over 20 words, make especially sure that in these cases you deploy the character + action sentence structure, and choose your characters so that they contribute to the overall rhetorical effect of your sentence.

**Generating Material for Your Own Op-ed**

Of course, you can learn all the tricks imaginable about writing leads, and about sentence lengths, but you can’t construct a decent argument if you don’t have any content. If you need to write an argument to present to a colleague or a committee, or in response to a report, then you won’t be lacking content. But for those of you who want to try your hand at a real op-ed, you will need to find a suitable topic. The following steps will be appropriate to everyone once the topic has been decided upon.
Some people are bursting with ideas ready to be shaped into a tight, well-argued op-ed. Others have ideas but they are too wide, unfocused, or insufficiently formulated. In both cases, some research will need to be done, and the results of the research will need to be organised in logical ways in order to be of maximum benefit to you in constructing a powerful argument.

Researching for Argument
First, identify the subject area in which you are interested. If you look at published op-eds you will notice that they almost always deal with topics that have been initially reported in one of the main news stories in the preceding few days, or they deal with issues that have been raised on the op-ed page in the previous day or two. ‘If it’s not in one of those two places, forget it’, says Leslie Cannold, a freelance writer and author, who regularly writes op-eds for a range of print media forums in Australia, in particular the Melbourne Age.

Now the amount and depth of research that you do will be dictated by your target audience. But let’s assume—for the sake of giving you some general principles—that the target audience is made up of readers of reasonable quality newspapers such as The Age, or the Australian.

You will need to read as much as possible of anything written on this topic over the past few weeks or months. You can do this by searching in the online archives of newspapers, where you can download articles for a small fee; or you can use databases of newspaper articles, such as Factiva or Lexis Nexis, often subscribed to by large libraries. This online searching is very efficient, since you can enter keywords and be taken directly to the relevant articles. Not all articles that have appeared in the print editions will be available in the online archive, however, but most of the important ones will. Many libraries also keep hardcopies of newspapers for weeks or months. Some university libraries also keep years or decades of back copies of newspapers on microform, which can be used in the library for free or for only a small fee.

Before you start the first draft of your op-ed, you should also take a look at the relevant sections of any recently published mainstream books. General internet searching can be useful too, although it can often function like a net with wide holes, bringing you in a lot
of garbage to sift though, along with useful material (for detailed information on researching, see Chapter 13). Take notes from all this reading and skimming. To move from this mass of information you have collected in note from, through to first draft, you first need to organise the information. From the work of various rhetoricians, an organisational method has been adapted that can be of great assistance.

This method has its roots in the work of ancient rhetorician Aristotle. He devised what he called *topoi*, a word that meant: places one can metaphorically ‘go’ in search of material; Aristotle then adapted this for use with composing material on ‘everyday’ subjects, and came up with a list of what he called ‘common topoi’. A modern rhetorician, Richard Coe, has further revised the ‘common topoi’ and turned them into the following five questions. From his elaboration of the five questions, I have listed verbs that make clear what you have to do in answering the question.1

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Questions</th>
<th>Elaborations</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>1. What is this subject area that interests you?</td>
<td>describe, define, classify, divide into parts, aspects</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2. What have ‘experts’ or ‘authorities’ said about it?</td>
<td>quote authorities, cite statistics, precedents, maxims, proverbs, parallels, etc.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>3. What is it like and unlike?</td>
<td>compare, contrast, analogise, give examples</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>4. What caused it? (its past)</td>
<td>consider it as part of a process, analyse its functions</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>5. What can come of it? (its future) Or fail to come of it? (its future)</td>
<td>explain why it exists, tell the story in which it plays a part.</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

You will find that if you ask yourself these five questions about your topic, and jot down notes in response to the elaboration for each question, you will end up with far more material than you need. You can then narrow and focus the topic, and only use the information generated from the particular questions that fit your intended focus.

*Opinionated ‘Word Bytes’* 103
Once you have focused or narrowed your subject matter, the next step is to try to sum up your focus by using an ‘arguable statement’. An arguable statement is simply one that calls for evidence, either to uphold or to rebut it.

A Published Op-ed
The article ‘Hey, Pollies, You’re in My Space. Get Out!’ (see Appendix 10), published in *The Age*, just prior to the Australian Federal election at the end of 2007, was written by one of my first-year students, Brendan Lawley. Its arguable statement goes something like: ‘The two leaders (Rudd and Howard) are dumbing down debate, with their cringe-worthy internet attempts to target young people.’

Now as I discussed in Chapter 4, an argument is always more powerful if it is presented in an oppositional way (as it is in Roland Barthes’ article ‘The World of Wrestling’, analysed in that chapter). In tackling this, Brendan would not have found it difficult to come up with his oppositional idea. So if we recast his arguable statement to include the opposition, we get something like this: ‘Although use of the internet was inevitable in the political campaign, the two leaders are dumbing down debate, doing a disservice to the young people they are trying to target.’

You will notice that the original arguable statement is cast into much sharper relief when contrasted with an oppositional statement in this way. Note that the oppositional clause does not necessarily have to be stated in the op-ed in its original form (although sometimes it is), but it certainly needs to inform the content of the piece. If you are having trouble with constructing the oppositional clause, I always find it helps to make it the dependent clause, at the beginning of the whole sentence, and start with the word ‘Although’.

Once you have constructed your arguable statement into a sentence with an oppositional structure, you should return to the result generated by your ‘common topoi’ questions above, to see if you have enough of the right sort of material. You might find that you need to do a little more specific research in order to deal optimally with the oppositional clause.

Now you can start writing your first draft. Op-eds have a very direct, immediate and clear structure, outlined in the following section.
The Op-ed Structure

Title
Titles should sum up the main argument in less than one line. The title of this article achieves this objective very well with the choice of colloquial statement, as if coming from a young person annoyed with the ‘pollies’. Most beginning writers find it very hard to think up a suitable title. One method for assisting with this is to take a few words out of your arguable statement, perhaps find synonyms for some of the words in the statement, and string three or four words together to form your title.

In reality, sub-editors at the newspaper will choose article titles. They are very experienced at this and usually do a very good job, as with Brendan’s article. However, when sending an article to a newspaper, writers must always do their best to choose an interesting title—a ‘word byte’ in effect—otherwise the piece will fail to grab the editor from the start and not stand a chance of publication. Of course, editors always imagine they can do better than the titles chosen by writers, and so will invariably try to improve upon yours!

Opening Paragraph/Lead
This should contain a ‘currency tag’ (sometimes called ‘the news hook’), which should make clear why this op-ed is relevant now. In Brendan’s article, this is achieved by mention of the forthcoming Australian election in the second sentence.

Topic Sentence
This tells us the general topic of the piece. It can be separate from the currency tag, or can be combined as it is in this one: ‘Continuing the trend started by the American Democrats’ policy launch on YouTube this year, the Australian election has shaped up into a digital affair. And as one of the teenagers targeted by these campaigns, I’m embarrassed.’ The topic sentence should make clear the issue or topic—that is, the subject—of the op-ed.

Opinion Sentence(s)/Paragraph
This is really your arguable statement, usually recast to bring in more information, and also constructed to maximise flow and style. In Brendan’s article, the first and second paragraphs combine to give the
opinion. This conforms to what is a fairly standard convention in op-eds; in most, readers are given the writer's opinion by the second paragraph at the latest.

**First/Best Argument in Support of Opinion**
This is in the first two sentences of the third paragraph, starting with ‘Rudd and Howard are both guilty of dumbing-down political debate in the way they are using the internet.’

**Evidence in Support of First Argument**
This comes in the fifth paragraph, starting with ‘Howard uploaded his first video announcements on YouTube early in September’ and continues for the whole paragraph. Interestingly, two paragraphs of needed background information, inflected with opinion, was insterted between the argument and the evidence. After that come two paragraphs (6 and 7) of evidence by way of examples.

Because this op-ed is about politicians doing a disservice to young people, and is written from the explicit viewpoint of the youth demographic, there is some quite justified use of the pronoun ‘I’, although mostly confined to the fourth and fifth paragraphs. The lack of this pronoun elsewhere (when it could quite legitimately have been used), has the effect of heightening the ethos of the tone (see Chapters 3 and 4 for explanations of ethos), given that the subject matter is what is generally considered to be a serious topic—politics.

**Second Best Argument in Support of Opinion**
This is in the ninth paragraph of the article, starting with the sentence, ‘While the Prime Minister’s addresses to the masses on YouTube never stood a chance of roping in youths, Kevin Rudd has had more success with his internet campaign.’ Note that it is not so much a new argument as a sub-argument of the first argument.

**Evidence for Second Argument**
This is the whole of paragraph ten, which provides evidence by example, mentioning Rudd’s t-shirts having ‘become cult collectables’, and ‘thousands’ signing up ‘to receive “Kmail”’.
Third Argument in Support of Opinion
This cleverly follows immediately from the evidence above, by arguing that this very shallow form of popularity shows that ‘Australian youths have fallen for Kevin Rudd, the product.’

Evidence for Third Argument
The evidence is embedded in the same paragraph, no. 10, with the third argument expressed in the first sentence, as I showed above, and the final sentence of the paragraph: ‘The people responding to Rudd’s message’ are so young that they ‘cannot help decide the outcome of the election.’

Final Paragraphs
In most mass-media op-eds, three arguments is the norm. Some, however, do have more, particularly if the sub-arguments are closely related to the main argument, as they are in this article. The fourth sub-argument is expressed in the one-sentence paragraph, no. 12: ‘Another casualty in this media mobilisation war is public debate.’ Two paragraphs of evidence then follow. Concluding paragraphs usually reiterate the opinion paragraph, in light of the arguments and evidence presented. Brendan’s penultimate paragraph introduces a humorous aside about the oft-repeated (at the time) visit of Rudd to a strip club decades earlier. But this is not completely off the main topic, since it serves to show the perils of politicians conducting their campaigns in cyberspace.

The final paragraph sums up everything presented in the article in a succinct two sentences: ‘Meanwhile, another day passes and the federal election draws closer. Another day wasted on triviality rather than policy.’

Be careful that you construct your argument in a way that clearly states your opinion at the beginning, instead of the academic or school essay structure that does not state the opinion at the start, but builds towards a conclusion comprising the opinion. The op-ed is the inverse of the academic essay. It is reader-friendly, has a powerful and accessible argumentative structure, and is an ideal model for any prose that needs to be used to change people’s minds, or to stimulate action.
Further Reading

Notes
1 Coe, pp. 96–7.
Reviewing is telling other people what to think of something, getting them to see something your way. But we humans don’t usually like being told what to think, so there are certain conventions we must follow if we want to capture and keep an audience long enough to tell them anything. According to the Oxford English Dictionary, a review is an examination of something, leading to the expression of a view of it; in other words, an opinion. We are all comfortable with opinions; we might not always believe other people’s opinions, but most of us are happy to share our opinions with others and to receive those that others share with us. We are happier still if those opinions are structured as ‘objective’ and are accompanied with evidence. These are then known as ‘considered opinions’.

Reviewing is simply about forming a considered opinion, and then communicating this opinion to others in writing that is a polished and interesting product in itself, so that it will attract and keep readers. In this chapter I will talk about writing book reviews, but a review can be about anything really—a government paper or policy, a course or curriculum, an advertising plan, an evaluation of a training program; the list is endless. Reviews of art exhibitions, and cultural events such as plays and films have their own specific conventions, and are covered in depth in Chapter 10.
Many of the skills involved in reviewing are generic. You need to be able to express a coherent, reasoned, informed opinion on the original text, in a way that will attract and keep readers, and in a manner that will encourage readers to ‘see it your way’—to agree to some extent with your opinion. In order to achieve this, there needs to be an argument of sorts in a review, which can range from a subtle point of view through to a full-on logically constructed argument such as those found in the op-ed genre discussed in Chapter 8.

Reviewing skills are also applicable to academic writing. Even before you arrive at your opinion, you must analyse the subject matter critically, you must find out as much as possible on the subject matter (that is, you must conduct research: on the author, on her previous books, on the general discourse area and so on), and you must synthesise all of this to decide what you really think of the work in question. You must then communicate this opinion to a certain target audience. Academic reviews are covered in Chapter 13.

Before you think of writing a review yourself, you should read the book reviews published each weekend in the broadsheet newspapers such as The Age, The Sydney Morning Herald or The Australian. For the purposes of comparison, you should also read the reviews in tabloid newspapers, such as the Herald Sun (which will be much shorter), as well as those in specialist reviewing magazines such as Australian Book Review or the New York Review of Books (which will be considerably longer), or in online magazines such as Cordite (www.cordite.org.au). This latter magazine is the one from which the review example reprinted in Appendix 11 is taken. You will notice that reviews are almost always of books recently published, never of old books.

Your next step is to go to a good bookshop and find the New Releases shelves. Choose fiction or non-fiction according to your reading tastes, or one of each—making sure they deal with subject matter you think will interest you. Reading recently published writing will help you understand exactly what sort of writing style and subject matter the Australian public is reading right now. Even if the book is from another country, the fact that it is on sale in Australia indicates that the publisher thinks it will sell here. If you have time, try to read two or three books, so that you can choose the one that you think will give you the most scope to form and express a considered opinion.
Reviewing doesn't need to be daunting. Most of us do at least some reviewing in our everyday lives. We form opinions about television programs or films that we see, on books that we read, on all manner of things that come before us. Sometimes we try to communicate these opinions, and sometimes we keep them to ourselves. What are we doing when we do try to communicate our opinion? We are really saying, ‘see it my way: don’t go/do go and see this film; read/don't read this book’ and so on.

One of the main differences between this sort of ‘everyday’ opinion and one that is to be expressed publicly is the style of language. Often, in informal situations we will say, ‘I really liked this book.’ Or, ‘I absolutely hated that film.’ And, because the people to whom we are talking usually know us, they can judge whether they will like the book or the film on the basis of their knowledge of our tastes, and whether their tastes match ours. In a public situation, this prior knowledge of common personal tastes does not exist, and so the language we use to encourage people to accept our opinions needs to be different. In a professional situation, where we are writing a review of a work process, for example, the readers might know the author, but cannot be swayed (or be seen to be swayed, which amounts to the same thing) by what seems to be only the author's personal preferences.

So the author must make sure the language style used seems ‘objective’ (the opinion itself is no less personal than if written in a personal style, but it is the illusion of objectivity, the disguise, which counts), and be sure to back all the assertions with ‘evidence’. This is why we never see such phrases as ‘I like …’ or ‘I dislike …’ in published reviews. Instead we see things such as: ‘I could not help but identify with …’ or ‘The author lost me when she stopped the narrative for two pages to give us the geological history of the area …’

Here is a very clear and precise example of good reviewing language.

The bitter, melodramatic prose of Jiang Ching, angrily writing from jail on her death day, is counterbalanced by an omniscient voice casting a lukewarm eye on the prisoner’s story. Initially disconcerting, the frequency with which the narrators change adds to the impassioned,
operatic urgency of the book. The pace is heightened by Min’s use of short sentences, the present tense and flash-forwards often revealed in a quick aside. (Hayden)

Notice that in this passage the author more often than not uses the passive voice of verb tenses: ‘The … prose … is counterbalanced … The pace is heightened … flash forwards [are] often revealed …’ (passive verbs have been italicised).

The reason for this use of passive is that the author has chosen stylistic features as characters in these sentences: the prose, the pace, and the flash forwards. It is important to focus on such stylistic features in a review of a novel, but it would not seem right to put active verbs after them, since they were in fact created by the author, and are not really agents of action themselves. Take time in your own reviewing to make sure you choose the characters that you want your readers to focus on.

You will notice in this same excerpt that the reviewer has commented on several important aspects of prose: the tone (bitter and melodramatic), the narrator (omniscient and lukewarm, frequently changing), the pace of the book (impassioned, operatically urgent) and—most important of all—how something is achieved; in this case: the pace of the narrative, achieved with present tense, short sentences, flash-forwards.

Here is another example of good reviewing language, this time analysing a non-fiction book:

What grows increasingly apparent as you read Robert MacFarlane’s elegant and scholarly book about mountains is that it is no more written for those who climb mountains than Hemingway’s The Old Man and the Sea was for marlin fishermen. It is a wider, though no less gripping, investigation into why people mountaineer at all. In the best nature writing … the landscape under observation is not merely described but, in a sense, summoned into existence. (Williamson)

The important aspects described here are the intended audience (not necessarily those who climb mountains), the whole point of the
book (an investigation into why people mountaineer) and what the best nature writing should do (summon landscapes into existence).

**Verb Tenses**
The convention is to use the present tense (the ‘literary present’), as you would in literature essays, unless referring to events external to the book that have ended long ago—for example World War II.

**Structure**
Whatever their target audience, most reviews share a similar structure. Most have a four-part structure:

1. introduction
2. overview
3. evaluation
4. conclusion

This four-part structure will work well for almost any type of review—an appraisal of a report, of an employee training program, or a course evaluation. I will now deal in more detail with each section of this structure.

**Introduction**
As with all prose that you want people to notice, your lead must be catchy—it must be a ‘word byte’. If some of the information is unusual or significant, start with that. But the best way—as with most mainstream writing in this media age—is to drop your reader immediately into the heart or action of the experience. If your opening images are strong and catchy, your reader will wait for explanations (although not for too long).

If you can start by landing your reader into a physical sensation, then do it. You can also start by using a relevant, and interesting anecdote. The book’s author and title are often mentioned in the first paragraph, but not necessarily. After all, these details should appear at the top of the review, straight after the title of the review. Here are some examples of various types of catchy openings:

A is for Adultery, and B is for Beware. But A Child’s Book of True Crime is mostly brought to you by the letter C, for the
Consequences when Doomed Girls sleep with dentists or daddies. (Griffin)

Griffin's play with initials and sensationalist words is sure to attract a reader's attention.

Many years ago, I saw the euthanasia advocate Jack Kevorkian speak in Melbourne. It was a chilling experience, as his talk revealed to me a man as fascinated by the dying process as he was concerned with the rights of the dying. (Zion)

Note how Zion's personal anecdote takes us straight into the subject matter of the book.

It may be that you can’t—or shouldn’t at least—judge a book by its cover. It would be almost impossible, nevertheless, to remain indifferent to the ravishing presentation of Nicholas Jose’s new novel. (Reimer)

Many reviewers share Reimer’s interest in the physical presentation of the book. But this should only be done if the cover is particularly different or outstanding in some way.

The Next Novel is a hard act, particularly after two Booker Prize shortlistings, for Such a Long Journey (1991) and A Fine Balance (1996) which also won the Commonwealth Writers Prize, and was chosen by Oprah for her Book Club. (Hueston)

Here, Hueston starts by talking about the author’s previous, prizewinning books; in other words, the reviewer places the current book in context. Sometimes a reviewer starts by sketching out the issue that the book will deal with, but does not mention the actual book until the second, third or even fourth paragraph. This is necessary if the issue the book deals with is complex, necessitating an introduction that
deals more with the actual issue than the book itself. I did this with my review of Jessica Benjamin’s *The Bonds of Love* (see Appendix). Notice how the book’s title is not mentioned until the start of the third paragraph.

Sometimes a reviewer is dealing with someone very well-known, and even polarising, about whom many people may hold strong opinions. Rather than arguing for one view or another of this author, it can be effective to highlight the contradictory nature of these responses to the author, in this way creating some strong friction to power the review. Gus Goswell does this in his review of a new volume of poems by well-known Australian poet Les Murray, which is reprinted in Appendix 11, but he also is careful to include a lot of important and relevant factual information about Murray.

One of the most revered, most hated, most praised and most criticised figures in Australian literature, Les Murray is Australia’s best-known living poet. He has been awarded the Mondello Prize, T.S. Eliot Prize, Queen’s Gold Medal for poetry and many other local and international honours. In 1999 he helped Prime Minister John Howard draft a preamble to the Australian Constitution. He has been officially designated a Living National Treasure and his name is often accompanied by the appellation ‘Australia’s national poet’.

But who is the real Les Murray? (Goswell)

In her review of Cathi Hanauer’s *The Bitch in the House*, Helen Elliott takes her whole first paragraph to explain the play on words of the book’s title, but mentions the actual book only towards the end of her second paragraph.

A long time ago, in the first quarter of the 20th century, a woman of some genius and incandescent self-awareness wrote about the invisible presence behind every smoothly functioning household and, by extension, every successful man. She called this presence ‘the Angel in the house’.

Almost a century later an American journalist … has collected a series of essays from 26 women, including
herself, under the title *The Bitch in the House*. The woman of genius was Virginia Woolf. The American Journalist is Cathi Hanauer. (Elliott)

**Overview**

With so much print media for the public to choose from, reviewers provide a service to their target readership—a sort of cultural sifting, if you like. Reviewers are really providing abstracts and opinions on most new books, enabling their readers to keep up with what’s being published without having to read every new book—which would be impossible. But of course the reviewer’s ultimate end result is *to influence*—to cause someone to buy, or not to buy a book. This is pretty powerful stuff, and reviewers do have a responsibility to give considered, knowledgeable opinions.

You should aim in the overview section to describe and briefly discuss the book. With fiction, you will often have to negotiate a fine line between explaining enough of the story so that readers will be able to follow you, and not giving away important plot elements, thus ruining the pleasure of prospective readers. If in doubt, err on the side of caution (that is, tell too little, rather than too much); then ask someone whom you trust, but who has not read the book, to read over your review and tell you if it makes sense to them, and if it does not give too much away.

Unless you did it in the introduction, it is often in this overview section that you should set the book in context. With contextualising, it is important to select and include only the most relevant information. If the author has won an award for their writing, it would be remiss of the reviewer to leave out that information; on the other hand, if you happen to know that the author is a triathlete, for example, this mightn’t be relevant if the book is about a completely unrelated field. If the author of a book used to be an editor, or an academic, though, then these are relevant details.

Other details that might be relevant in the ‘context’ section include:

1. The ideological or political positioning of the author (feminist psychoanalyst, or multimillionaire pop fiction queen?)
2. This author’s other works, or, if there are no other works, it’s worth mentioning that this person is a ‘first time’ author
3 The author’s reputation or at least a brief biography (for example: granddaughter of Tolstoy; or son of a famous actor)
4 The process of the book’s writing or publishing; for example, interesting details such as the book having to wait 30 years to be published, and receiving 96 rejections before it was accepted
5 The relationship of this particular work to current reading fashions (for example: if the book is historical fiction, travel stories, or first person ‘confessional’ sounding fiction, all of which are popular at the moment).

In Goswell’s review of Les Murray's book, he needed a lot of room to discuss Murray’s controversial reputation, and to give an overview of his dominant subject matter over the years, because it was through this framework that he intended to go on to discuss and appraise the work.

Evaluation
For this section you need to gather your evidence, as fairly as you can (this might involve reading around the topic), including textual evidence from the book (the most important type), and then organise your evidence. In this ‘evidence’ section, you will need to talk about the thematic or technical aspects of the work.

Here’s an example of what I mean by ‘thematic or technical aspects’, through which runs the thread of evaluation, in Goswell’s review of Murray. Note that longer sentences are allowed in book reviews than in most other mass media genres. The first excerpt deals with thematic aspects, the second with technical aspects.

A poem such as ‘The New Hieroglyphics’ gives further insight into Murray’s fascination with our [Australian] dictionary and its delivery. Australian animals are also a fascination of Murray’s. Particularly noteworthy is the series of poems from his 1992 release Translations of the Natural World that are written from the point of view of the animal. (Goswell)

In the best of Murray’s poems, image and emotion are inseparable. In others, the image contorts within the screw-press of the poet’s opinion while emotion hardens into...
conviction. In the weaker poems the voice is too literal and susceptible to verbiage. Yet in ‘Poetry and Religion’, an unwieldy piece that stretches too far beyond its potential, for example, there is evidence of Murray’s skill; a persistent reader may discover the poem within the poem … (Goswell)

As with the personal narrative article (covered in Chapter 3), in the book review we need the unifying thread made and kept visible—and this thread is really composed of the reviewer’s main view. The thread may happen naturally, if you work at creating links between paragraphs; or you may need to go back after one draft and ‘pull it together’, by inserting sentences, redrafting other sentences and paragraphs, inserting or deleting material. As always, we want characters in the subject positions of sentences, lively and interesting verbs and the active voice of verbs wherever possible. Also, we want a variety of short and medium-length sentences and then maybe the occasional longish one, but no long paragraphs.

In book reviews, what types of characters should we have in the subject positions of sentences? Most often we should use the author as our character; and the convention for this is to give their whole name first, and thereafter just their surname. But we also use as characters the actual book’s characters, if the book is a novel, or a non-fiction work about people. In a non-fiction work which discusses issues, concepts and philosophies, we would use key concepts as the linguistic characters in sentences. Goswell frequently uses the poet, or the poet’s reputation or ability as the character in his sentences, at other times he uses the poems and sometimes the poem’s tone or lines, all appropriate characters.

In reviewing there’s very little justification for characterless sentences. And it is certainly not worth choosing abstract, waffly things for our characters, nor long strings of words. Remember: in each sentence we must get readers to the verb quickly, to maximise the ‘word byte’ effect. When that happens, readers are pulled along almost in spite of themselves and then they generally won’t put the piece down after only a couple of sentences.
Conclusion
This is where you can sum up your evaluation: will it be thumbs up, thumbs down, or somewhere in the middle, based on your evaluation discussion above? If you think the negative aspects are minor, then it is often best to include them only fleetingly in the conclusion of the review, and within an otherwise largely positive block. Here’s an example of this, again from Gosswell’s review of Murray’s book:

The pieces taken from his 2002 collection Poems the Size of Photographs provided welcome relief at this point in this Selected [Poems] when the form and content of his longer work had become predicable, even wearying. In these shorter poems, I rediscovered Murray’s sharpness, his ability to deftly render image into word. (Goswell)

This is basically ‘thumbs up’. So is this:

Hearing of [Sun Shuyun's] travels may have been worth it had her experiencees culminated in great personal revelation about the religion in which she was so interested. But at the end of the book you get a strong sense she is still looking. Then again, maybe that’s just the Buddhist way. (Lamperd)

A mostly negative review that nevertheless tries to find positives here and there, ends this way:

With few characters, almost no dialogue and a setting barely sketched in, the inner life of Julius has too much weight to carry. Yet, here and there, in all the tedium, there's authentic terror.

Twenty-one years exploring the wasteland have not diminished Brookner’s power, however wilfully she may choose to hold it in. (Niall)

One doesn’t often find a totally negative review in the mainstream media, but reviewer Helen Elliott produced one in her review
of *The Bitch in the House*, mentioned above. This is how Elliott ended the review:

*The Bitch in the House* is a thoughtless, self-referential collection written by a series of pouty little girls—the sort of little girls who believe all women, all over the world, are exactly like them, middle-class and privileged. They are not one jot serious about any real issues, about working behind the scenes at any practical, political, low-profile level to effect change. The book is coyly dedicated to Hanauer’s husband, the doubtless long-suffering Dan.

We are certainly nauseated but it’s a close run thing with insulted and dismayed. (Elliott)

Definitely a thumbs down. But note how all the final lines I have quoted here—whether thumbs up or down—are couched in a strong and interesting sentence, giving a sense of closure to the review.

Elliott’s review also uses a more sophisticated device for achieving closure, by returning to a point made earlier: the ‘nauseated’ of the review’s last line is a reprise of the word used earlier in the review in a quotation from Virginia Woolf: ‘... this collection calls to mind another of Woolf’s observations when reviewing a collection of essays: “We are nauseated by the sight of trivial personalities decomposing in the eternity of print.”’

Sometimes a final paragraph will not really pass judgement, but instead attempt to sum up the entire theme of the book, or an important point within it. This will often entail a quote from the book. The next two examples have used this method.

But Bryson does make a case for how much luck has played a part in the evolution of the world and in our responses to it. How to manage that luck, he concludes, ‘is a trick we have only just begun to grasp.’ (Jillett)

In the final pages, Broinowski raises the spectre of ‘Bali blowback’, the idea that Australians became victims of the Bali bombing as much through their own behaviour as that of the terrorists. It is a view that has already drawn
conservative scorn. ‘Too late, Australians discovered that such perceptions can determine life and death,’ she writes. Whether this was because of Canberra’s parroting of Washington’s world view, Western appearance or a long-standing hostility of many Indonesians to Australia or all three is, according to Broinowski, a matter of conjecture.

(John Schauble)

Balancing Positive and Negative Comments
Most reviewers try to mention any negative aspects in a constructive way. Too much negativity, and readers could think ‘bias’ and will switch off. Any less-than-ideal aspects can generally be presented in an informed and careful way. This can often be achieved by appropriate choices at the sentence level—by strategic selection of characters and actions. Here's an example of negative comments from Andrew Reimer's review, quoted earlier:

Once or twice, I must admit, these complex ambitions and literary strategies result in bathos or else betray higher than comfortable levels of contrivance. (Reimer)

Notice how Reimer has definitely avoided putting the author as the character here. It's the ‘complex ambitions and literary strategies’ that are at fault, not the author.

Here's another negative comment from a review:

Money saves the day, but such pat endings as served up here rip readers away from what had seemed an immersion in reality. Then again, this is commercial fiction where no one disputes the power or redemptive force of the dollar. (Cresswell-Myatt)

Note the canny absence of characters in these negative comments as well. Here the reviewer is talking about the nature of the ending (it’s too pat), and what this does to the reader (makes us think it’s unrealistic). She also brings in a value judgement, which is a sort of subtle putdown of the ethic that money makes everything alright.
In general, it is considered to be the duty of a reviewer to engage with the ethics of a particular book; and in fact not to do so can be a flaw in reviewing.

You cannot examine absolutely everything in 700 words, the length of most book reviews published in mainstream newspapers. So choose the most interesting or attention-grabbing aspects of the book and make sure you analyse them critically. Then sort your comments into positive and negative blocks.

Don't jump from positive to negative aspects within the one paragraph, unless the two aspects are very much linked; for example, extremely strong evocation of a central character might make readers aware, in contrast, of the deficiencies of the characterisation of another central character. In Goswell's review the contradictory aspects of Murray's reputation had been the central theme of the review right from the start, so it was appropriate to juxtapose negative and positive comments about the work. In general, you should end up with blocks of positive and negative commentary; remember, though, to construct links between each of your paragraphs to maximise the flow of the writing.

Vocabulary Levels
From reading a range of reviews, you will notice how there is often a different vocabulary level between the reviews in the broadsheet newspapers (such as *The Age, The Sydney Morning Herald*) and tabloid newspapers such as the Melbourne *Herald Sun*. There are also different word lengths. Those in the broadsheets tend to be about 700 words (although those in *The Australian* are longer than that), with those in the tabloids about 350 words. Most reviewers find that the shorter the review, the harder it is to write. If you are given any choice in the matter, make your review a medium length of, say, 800–1000 words. If you are aiming for publication, however, you will have to conform to the word length set by the editor.

The style of language in Andrew Reimer's review from *The Age* that I quoted, above, would probably not be the most suitable for the tabloids. But there is more flexibility from the other direction: the language from reviews in tabloids would probably be appropriate for broadsheets, as broadsheets always contain some reviews written in a simpler or more informal prose style. Simple prose does not
inevitably mean simpler ideas or simpler conceptualising. But the biggest difference between reviews in these two types of publications is that of length: broadsheet reviews, at 600–700 words, are approximately twice the length of those in tabloids. But most of all, it’s important to read up-to-date examples of reviews in the publications for which you are aiming to write, and become familiar with the respective language styles.

Fiction vs Non-fiction
There’s not a lot of difference in *structure* between reviews of fiction or poetry and reviews of non-fiction books, but there *is* a difference in content: the reviewer of fiction or poetry needs to comment on the form, on the crafting of the writing more than one does with non-fiction.

With non-fiction we look more at the content than the form. We might comment on the issues covered; on the logic of the arguments; on the selection and arrangement of the material; on the general usefulness, perhaps, of the book in helping readers making sense of a particular topic; and on any gaps in the author’s treatment of the subject matter. If a reviewer has the room, it could still be appropriate to comment on the prose style—but mainly in terms of ease of reading, or otherwise, of the writing.

It may be necessary in reviewing non-fiction to introduce and discuss the issue in the introduction, or to give more explanation of the overall topic in the description/explanation section, than you would need to in a review of fiction or poetry.

Tone of Voice and Style of Writing
Selecting an appropriate tone of voice and style for your review is crucial. The preferred style is not nearly as chatty as it can be with other forms of writing, such as the personal narrative article. It’s not as formal as academic writing, although in the specialist review magazines such as *Australian Book Review*, the language can be somewhat academic. But in mainstream broadsheets the style is informed and educated, although not too specialised. Unless you have been given a specific reviewing task, and have been told to aim it at a particular target demographic, the style of the mainstream broadsheets is a good one to have in mind as your ‘default’ style. It is one which
average readers can generally understand, even if they might need to reach for their dictionary occasionally.

**Quotations**
As you will have noticed from the excerpts of book reviews I have included in this chapter, you will need quotations from the reviewed book now and then to back up your assertions. These quotations should generally not be longer than three lines; they should be interwoven as much as possible in your own sentences, and you shouldn’t need more than about three of them in a 700-word review.

**Research**
Good reviewers have to get their facts right. Reviewers always do some research on the authors of any books they are reviewing: biographical details, other works by that author and so on. They should also familiarise themselves with the general topic area of the book—and reviewers are often chosen precisely for their expertise. Someone who teaches writing may be asked to review a new writing manual; a lawyer may be asked to review a biography of a judge or an autobiography of an ex-criminal.

Research is important. But how do you know when enough is enough? Generally the deadline decides this for you; you simply don’t have time for endless research. You also know you have done enough research if you find that you simply keep turning up similar material to that which you have already found.

What’s the easiest and best research method for writing a review? Most of the research that you will need to do can now of course be done on the internet. If you put the author’s name into a search engine, you’ll generally find that information about them appears on many websites—publishers, booksellers, even the author’s own website. The most useful are those by the author’s publisher; these will list all the other works and often a synopsis of the plot, or an extract, biographical details of the author, and often they’ll reprint excerpts of favourable reviews of the author’s work. Remember, though, that any material on a publisher’s website is functioning as advertising. Do not quote much, if any, of this material. You do not want your review to turn into an advertisement.
If this author has been prolific, and you have not come across any of his or her work before, it might be a good idea to obtain a few of his or her other works from a library, and have a quick flick through them. You can also use the online archive of broadsheet newspapers (usually for a small fee), to see if there’s been any general news about the author recently. Libraries, especially university and state libraries, will also have an online database of newspaper articles such as Lexis Nexis News. For more information about research using databases or search ‘gateways’ see Chapter 13.

If you come across articles which profile the author and quote him or her directly, be very careful that you do not take more than a line or so from this, and even then make sure that you fully attribute this line to the author, and state to whom she said it (make clear it was an interview in X magazine, for example).

**Getting Started**

Those of you who would like to develop your reviewing skills should now go back to the start of this chapter and follow each step. Don’t slavishly follow my structure, or feel that you must have an equal number of paragraphs for each section. If you feel the issue the book deals with is complex, necessitating five paragraphs of explanation and contextualising, for example, then go for it. The same goes for the evaluation and the conclusion.

A trick I use to get myself started with a review is to try and think of a catchy opening line—a ‘word byte’, in fact—while I am still reading the book. Later when I’m writing the review, I may go back and redraft this opening line, or even change it, although often it stays. It’s a good way to get focused and started. Here are some catchy first lines written by three of my best students. I think most of us reading these lines want to read on.

This book is about making love. And it doesn't involve sex.

(Hannah Teoh)

Imagine all the creative passion in the world. Now imagine all that passion captured in a single book.

(David Wollstonecraft)
One way to describe Danny Katz’s *Dork Geek Jew* is to say that it is a delectable literary dim sim. Easy on the palate, not heavy enough to be a main course, and stuffed with dubious content. (Cliff Gay)

**Further Reading**  
Book review journals such as: *Australian Book Review, Times Literary Supplement* and *New York Review of Books*.  
Writing reviews on the arts is a great way to break into the media. Almost every type of magazine and newspaper, print and online, runs this type of review. Smaller publications often need freelancers and new writers to write arts and culture reviews; and while you may not get paid at first, you will be rewarded with a growing folio of published work.

Most print journalists have some experience in arts and culture reviewing. Some make a career out of it, while others might only be called on every now and again to write a few hundred words on a new CD, DVD or art exhibition for the entertainment section.

Reviewing can seem like a glamorous job—watching movies, going to the theatre, seeing bands, listening to CDs or going to fashion parades—all for work! But it’s not all fun and free stuff. Reviewing is a serious business.

Arts and culture reviewing for a mainstream media publication can mean carrying an enormous amount of responsibility for your opinion. A favourable review often means the difference between ongoing success, or ongoing struggle for an artistic producer.

In 2007, a low-budget independent Australian film called *The Jammed* was set to go straight to DVD after most film distributors refused to take it on. After a showing at the Brisbane Film Festival,
David Stratton from *The Australian* and ABC’s *At the Movies*, and Jim Schembri from *The Age* both gave the film a four-and-a-half-star rating. After these reviews, distributors were suddenly beating down the door to get to it first. *The Jammed* went on to screen in every capital city in Australia as well as winning Best Film in that year’s *Inside Film* Awards—all due to a very favourable review from these powerful critics.

Critical acclaim carries huge weight in the world of arts and culture and so reviewers hold great power. Good critics wield this power judiciously and stand behind their opinions. They don't win respect for being too nice either. If you want to write arts and culture reviews must develop a very thick skin and a strong belief in your own opinions. After writing an unfavourable review you can be confronted and asked to justify your views. Arts and culture criticism is not for the faint hearted. Most importantly, reviewers must have the writing skills to write ‘word bytes’ in order to keep readers’ eyes glued to the page. When writing arts and culture reviews you must keep in mind three kinds of readers who turn to the reviews page:

- Artistic producers—the creators of the work themselves, their colleagues and associates who are interested in expert critical feedback.
- The work’s potential audiences—people who want to know whether to spend their own precious time and/or money on it.
- Interested observers—those who may not have any intention of actually going and seeing the work in question, but are interested in the discussion and simply enjoy reading arts and culture reviews.

Depending on the publication, its audience, and what you are reviewing, you may cater to one of these audience groups more than another. A small-run arts journal, for example, will have a higher concentration of the first group in its audience, while a mainstream newspaper will probably have a higher percentage of ‘observer’ readers. But all arts and culture reviews, to some extent, must juggle the competing demands of these three groups.

To reach out to the first group, a review must speak with credibility and communicate a strong sense of authority over the subject.
matter. For the second group, the review must communicate a strong opinion in a clear and coherent way, sometimes in only one or two hundred words. For the last group, a review must ensure that it stands alone as an interesting piece of writing even if the reader knows very little about the subject matter, or has no intention of experiencing it themselves.

So, how do you ensure your review includes all these characteristics? In the following pages we will address how to reach out to these different kinds of readers and create a compelling arts and culture reviewing technique.

**Speaking with Authority**
The most important element in communicating a sense of *ethos* (for an introduction to ethos, see Chapter 4), or authority, in any piece of writing is to know your subject. Not everyone who is commissioned to write film reviews has a degree in cinema studies. If you don’t have a great deal of background knowledge on your subject, you first job as a reviewer is to research. The more background knowledge you have, the more confidence you will have in your opinion, and that will give you a tone of authority in your expression.

Research questions you might like to ask yourself include:

- Who are the artistic producers involved? What are their backgrounds? Often you can ask a publicist for this kind of basic biographical information; see the section below for more information on getting information from publicists.
- What are the previous works by this artistic producer? Again, this kind of information may be provided by a publicist or the artistic producer’s own website.
- How has this person’s work been critically received in the past? You should do a thorough internet search to find any related press coverage. But don’t just rely on Google and Wikipedia. Be prepared to do some leg-work to find out as much as you can from smaller publications that may not be online.
- Where does this work fit in with wider artistic trends in the area? Here is where you will have to go beyond basic internet research. To find out about this, it is often good to look to academic journal articles and books. For pop cultural areas you can often also form
strong opinions on this by drawing on your own knowledge as a consumer. Talking to people ‘in the know’ is also vital. Sometimes this is the only way to get a good hold on the work’s context.

Once you have this kind of background knowledge, you will be able to formulate an informed opinion. The next step is to communicate this authoritative opinion on the page.

As we saw in the chapter on book reviewing, communicating a sense of authority often calls for an objective voice. The objective voice gives a sense of the writer making judgements based on their expert knowledge rather than their personal, subjective feelings. The objective voice sounds like this: ‘The performance was lacking in energy and authenticity and did not measure up to the glittering heights of some of the actor’s previous work.’ Saying the same thing in a subjective voice would sound something like this: ‘The actor really grated on my nerves.’

You can see the difference, the most obvious one being that the objective voice does not use the pronoun ‘I’. Opinions expressed in an objective voice do not talk about the writer’s—‘my’—personal preferences. They express judgements based on facts and evidence such as the quality of the performance in terms of technical standards, or the difference between this performance and previous examples.

This does not mean that the opinion being expressed is not personal or subjective in some way, all opinions are to some extent. The difference is that authoritative reviewers’ subjective opinions are informed by their expertise, which allows them to express their judgements in terms of objective knowledge of standards in the field. Or, in simple terms, using the objective voice communicates that you know what you are talking about.

Here is a good example of a reviewer using the objective voice:

*Holiday*’s irresistible charm is generated by the moment-to-moment detail of Lum and Moffatt’s performances. It’s a beautifully modulated show in which the silences, rich with subtext, are as compelling and complex as the dialogue. This stylised naturalism is heightened by a restrained and beautifully varied soundscape by David Franzke, a subtle
blending of baroque music, ambient noise and bird cries.
(Croggon)

In this theatre review the technical elements of the piece are objectively evaluated, such as the quality of the performances which show ‘moment-to-moment detail’, the pace and tone which is ‘beautifully modulated’ and the specific theatrical style described as ‘stylised naturalism’ that is ‘heightened’ by the soundscape.

There was reticence in the comedy and an evident need to please and not challenge. While many Australian comics are derisory of the media, McManus’s TV jokes were tentative and bland, using the easy name-checks of an insider unwilling to bite the hand. The jokes about the Pope’s makeover and George W. Bush’s bloopers were fun but the material dwindled and surprises were few. (Bramwell)

Here, the reviewer draws on his background knowledge of the performer, in this case the well-known TV presenter Rove McManus, and points out that his job as a well-paid and powerful TV personality may have contributed to his playing it safe with his jokes about the media. The reviewer makes analytical connections to objectively reason the possible causes for a lack-lustre performance.

In both these examples, the reviewer’s objective voice is strengthened by the use of ‘evidence’ in the form of observations of technical characteristics. To be able to provide this kind of evidence you need to have a firm grasp of the technical aspects of what you are reviewing. Consider this review of a new collection from fashion designer Collette Dinnigan:

The designer did not travel to the former communist state but she did capture the dark side of the new European fashion hot spot: short black jackets embellished with dark crystal beading on military collars or epaulets and cuffs. Her pencil skirts were tight and trousers skin tight. Short black dresses had embroidered bell sleeves, and satin dresses featured chic box-pleated collars. (Hush)
To give an informed opinion on this collection, the reviewer must be well-versed in technical fashion terms such as ‘epaulets’, ‘bell sleeves’ and ‘box pleats’. A similar example comes from the sample review provided in the back of this chapter. It is from a review I wrote for Melbourne’s broadsheet newspaper, *The Age* (reprinted in full in Appendix 12). The review is about new work from a young contemporary artist called Nick Mangan:

His use of ready-made industrial objects as the site for these abstract formal investigations reveals an intriguing creative perspective, which seems to be formed by the equal forces of a rigorous commitment to the lessons of fine art’s canon and an adolescence (not long left behind) in Geelong. (Strahan)

The authority in this review comes in part from the use of terms such as ‘ready-made’ and ‘abstract formal investigations’. If you feel you don’t know enough about the technical terms appropriate to your subject matter then you need to do more research.

**Communicating a Strong Opinion**

As we have seen above, arts and culture reviews should be analytical and discuss the subject matter in terms of its technical characteristics. But the defining element of a review, one that distinguishes it from an essay or a feature article, is that it should communicate a strong opinion on the *quality* of the subject matter.

This is the difference between the role of the critic, and the role of the everyday journalist. The critic is called on to cast critical judgement over their subject matter, while the journalist is traditionally asked not to judge but, rather, simply to relay the facts.

Communicating a strong opinion calls for assertive writing, and lots of active voice which decisively calls it as it sees it:

I can't defer any longer saying what is obvious from about 20 seconds into this album ... they're rubbish. Not ordinary, not unoriginal, not pass rubbish, just plain awful rubbish. Does it offend me? No. But it does bore and irritate me, which is much, much worse. (Zuel)
A successful review is an opinionated review. Whether you are communicating a positive or negative opinion, you need to stick your neck out. Don’t fall into the ‘three stars’ trap. Fence-sitting is no place for a reviewer. The opening paragraph of Jim Schembri’s review of *The Jammed*, discussed in this chapter’s introduction, leaves the reader in no doubt of his opinion:

Just when it was beginning to look like a ho-hum year for Australian film, along comes *The Jammed*, a low-budget, locally made shock of electricity that further restores one’s faith in just how good Australian social-realist films can be. (Schembri)

A reviewer can even give a zero-star rating as this one did:

You have to wonder what Stefan Popovic is doing on stage. Delivering his stand-up with little energy or emphasis, he rambles through diverse topics including ethnic Australians, children’s names, gym habits and gender differences.

It’s a dull monologue marked out by shallow observational humour and the lazy use of racist stereotypes.

Humourful? Quite the opposite. (Richards)

Many publications are now running very short arts and culture reviews like the example above, that give just a short ‘word byte’ of opinion on whether something is good or not. For these reviews the writer has to lace this ‘word byte’ with enough authority to sound convincing.

In the example above, Richards’ strong opinion is supported by his objective observations of the comedian’s delivery which is ‘dull’, lacks ‘energy or emphasis’ and ‘rambles’ through poorly chosen subject matter. These short ‘word byte’ arts and culture reviews are not complex evaluations, but rather punchy sharp shots that call for the writer to be extremely opinionated, and extremely clever and economical with language.
Writing a Good Read
While you are writing with authority and opinion, you also have to ensure that your review stands up as simply an interesting piece of writing. In this way, arts and culture reviewing offers some scope for writers with creative flair. There is a great history in the print media of critics who write with great wit and humour. One of the most renowned of these is Dorothy Parker who wrote theatre and book reviews for *The New Yorker*, *Vanity Fair* and US *Vogue* in the 1920s. Her reviews are famous for their acerbic ‘word bytes’:

Well, Aimee Semple McPherson has written a book. And were you to call it a little peach, you would not be so much as scratching its surface. It is the story of her life, and it is called *In the Service of the King*, which title is perhaps a bit dangerously suggestive of a romantic novel. It may be that this autobiography is set down in sincerity, frankness and simple effort. It may be, too, that the Statue of Liberty is situated in Lake Ontario. (Parker)

A rare few critics working today cut a similar swathe. One of the best known is A. A. Gill, who is a restaurant critic for *The Times* in London. See this example on a restaurant called Foxtrot Oscar:

Foxtrot Oscar is a talismanic example of why a certain style of English public schoolboy will never be fit for anything except dying in braying waves on barbed wire, shagging the staff, doing Sean Connery impressions, singing 13 verses of the Good Ship Venus and being auctioneers. They can, at a push, also manage to run small, louche restaurants. (Gill)

A. A. Gill and Dorothy Parker populate their arts and culture reviews with vivid characters and compelling narratives, all described in sharp, original and often hilarious detail. Their reviews are a joy to read because as well as critics they are both master story-tellers.

This is where arts and culture reviewing must engage with the journalistic skill of ‘finding the story’. Your review cannot simply be an analytical essay. It is a piece of journalism that needs an angle, a narrative structure, a punchy opening and plenty of sharp original detail.
Take this example from restaurant critic Jonathan Lethlean. In its opening paragraph the review hooks into a front-page political scandal to create interest, and then draws on this as a story-telling structure. The scandal involved two couples dining out at a restaurant called Iguanas. Lethlean parallels this well-known scenario with his own night out in a foursome as part of a prize in a charity raffle:

I have been bought. Worse, I’ve been bought before. There is, as the Prime Minister recently said of a certain federal backbencher, evidence of a pattern of behaviour. (And for the record, I have never eaten at Iguanas. I wouldn’t eat at a restaurant named Iguanas. And I suspect Belinda Neal won’t again either.)

So back to that behavioural pattern: it stands to reason I may well be bought again. In the past, a few important charities have benefited to the tune of a few dollars from the dubiously valued auction item of dinner as co-pilots on a bona fide restaurant review.

My foil tonight is a charming wife, and although her name really is ‘Neal’, mine isn’t anything as exotic as Della Bosca, even if I do like to think of myself as part-Italian. And to reinforce the myth, we’re at Sud 2, a part-Italian restaurant. (Lethlean)

Another critic who uses humour and a command of language to carve characters into sharp relief in her arts and culture reviews is Helen Razer. In this review of a stand-up comedy show by a well-known commercial radio personality, she sets her firm appreciation of the show against her own prejudices against FM radio, producing some classic barbed praise:

I was amply prepared to despise a show performed by one of FM’s stars. Damn this woman. She’s funny. And warm. And utterly engaging.

It’s true that Stanley’s aesthetic borrows heavily from Chapel Street in the early hours of Sunday morning. It is clear that this is a performer whose hours beneath a blow-dryer would have been better spent in script fine-tuning.
Nonetheless, she is an adroit ocker Fag Hag with charm to burn. Think Jeanne Little with a degree, better gags and nicer legs. I adored Stanley. (Razer)

It is important to remember that critics like these have had to earn their right to creative flair with an astute knowledge of their subject matter. In arts and culture reviewing, linguistic gymnastics without the weight of authority sounds smart-alecky and is easily dismissed. Until you are very adept, you must focus on setting your authoritative observations in a strong story-telling structure that has a firm angle, includes a beginning, a middle and an end, and that engages the reader immediately through a catchy opening paragraph of ‘word bytes’.

**Publicists**

Publicists have become such a large part of the arts and culture sector that all critics must deal with them at some point, and often on a regular basis. Reviewers are inundated with press releases, free tickets, books, CDs and more.

The debate about the role of publicists in the media is ongoing. In arts and culture criticism, as in other areas of journalism, publicists have made life both easier and more difficult. Easier in that background and biographical information can be provided to reviewers at the click of a mouse; harder because reviewers can become beholden to certain publicists as they come to rely on them for this kind of information.

It is important to be clear of the roles of the critic and the publicist. Publicists act on behalf of the artistic producer or organisation to provide information and act as a go-between. Critics publish independent opinions that should not be coloured by their relationship with the publicist.

To remain independent it is generally wise to be prudent about what you accept from publicists. Review tickets, biographies of people involved and other background information are usually provided as standard practice. It is fine to ask for these and to accept them. Accepting things beyond these standard provisions might be getting you into murky territory. I have heard professional arts journalists say that they feel bad giving someone negative press after they have
received a lovely book or expensive lunch. Publicists occupy powerful positions and can do favours, but if you are constantly accepting free tickets to things that you are not reviewing, you will quite reasonably be expected to repay the publicist one day in the form of a positive review.

Keeping careful relationships with publicists can be tricky, but it is one of the most essential parts of developing a professional reputation as an arts reviewer.

Further Reading
The philosophy, knowledge and skills that can give your writing ‘word byte’ quality when you are writing personal narrative articles (Chapter 3) or travel stories (Chapter 7) can also help if you want to write fiction. But while there are clearly identifiable structures for personal narrative articles and travel stories, there are many types of short stories and novels. The multitude of genres, styles and forms available in fiction is part of its appeal. In this chapter I will introduce some of the formal elements common to all fiction, and encourage you to develop your skills in the craft of fiction-writing.

**Fiction Writers Are Fiction Readers**

There are few rules or guidelines for the writing of fiction. Most fiction writers do not simply come up with an idea and then fit it into a structure. The process of writing is also a constant process of reading, for writers continually assess what they have written, whether by reading over a sentence they have written on the computer, or by reading through the first handwritten draft after a frenzy of inspired scribbling. It is important not to separate and privilege writing over reading, or vice versa, because the moment of conception to the final polished draft is a continual process of writing and reading, editing and redrafting.
This is why the well-rehearsed saying, that writers learn how to write by reading, has great merit. By reading short stories and novels and thinking about how they are written, you can develop a knowledge of the craft of writing. The most important thing to realise is that a work of fiction has been constructed in a particular way because of a series of choices made by its author; it could very well have been written in a different way. The decision making process is not arbitrary, but neither is it always self-evident, and this is why it is important to be aware of the range of possibilities available to you as a writer. You can only become aware of these possibilities by reading widely in fiction.

Once you develop your critical reading skills, and your awareness of the craft of writing, you can apply this to your own writing. This critical reading is a vital and ongoing part of the creative process because it helps you make the right decisions with your writing. As your knowledge of the craft becomes more intuitive it will help you generate ideas and guide your writing, and it will help you decide whether your story is working. Do not be afraid to rework your piece completely.

**Narrative, Story and Plot**  
As it is with most writing that attracts readers, the basis of all fiction is narrative, or story. Telling a chronological sequence of events is a narrative, or a story. But a story is not necessarily a plot. Most fictional stories and novels need a plot. A plot is created by the links between the events in a story. The following simple example is a story, but not a plot: ‘A woman has an affair, and then her husband gets fired from his job.’ But the following is a plot: ‘A man loses his job because his wife has an affair.’ Once you start thinking about how a story can be translated into a plot, you must think about not only the relationship between events, but also the manner in which this relationship could be revealed.

The ancient Greek philosopher and rhetorician Aristotle was the first to define plot, based on a study of ancient Greek drama. For Aristotle, plot was the centre of drama because it was concerned with actions. It is possible to make a distinction between the plot-based or goal-centred narrative, and the character-based narrative.

Plot- or goal-based narrative is typically associated with popular fiction in which all the events of the narrative lead towards an end
predetermined by the writer. Character-based narrative is associated with 'literary' fiction because the narrative is focused on the decisions characters make. This is a fair enough working distinction, but of course most fictional stories and novels have a plot of some sort because the decisions characters make lead to them taking certain actions. The question for writers is: what should you concentrate on? What is happening? Or: why is it happening, and what effects is it having?

**Elements of Plot**

Aristotle’s analysis of drama has led to the construction of a plot graph which charts the development of the plot through a number of steps: causative situation; complication; rising action; climax or turning point; falling action; and denouement, or the unravelling or resolving of the plot, or sometimes the ‘tying up of loose ends’.

The *causative situation* is typically the moment in a story when the narrative begins and characters are introduced. The *complication* involves some action or decision which changes the opening situation and impels the narrative forward. As a result of this complication the *action rises* towards a climax. The *climax* is not the end, but the *turning point* of a plot, the point at which the plot leads inevitably towards its conclusion, sometimes called the *falling action*. The *denouement* provides a resolution to the whole plot. If you think of mystery stories or detective novels the denouement is the point at which the mystery of the plot is revealed and explained. If you’re writing a mystery story the challenge for you is to keep the ending a secret from readers, but still avoid lengthy exposition.

A simple example of this plot structure is Shakespeare’s *Hamlet*. In the case of *Hamlet* the causative situation is the death of the king and the melancholy state of prince Hamlet. The complication is the arrival of the ghost of Hamlet’s father. The climax or turning point is the staging of the play within the play, which leads to the death of Polonius and Hamlet’s banishment from Denmark, forcing him to act.

The denouement of the play involves a tragic blood bath after which some sense of order is restored. One might also say there is a sort of existential denouement before this when Hamlet’s character comes to terms with death.
This narrative structure is not something you should follow slavishly, in the way Hollywood scriptwriters map their stories onto the three-act structure. But if you’re struggling with your plot, this structure can provide some useful guidance. If you don’t know where your characters are going, or you don’t know how to reach the end point of your plot, ask yourself what will be the turning points in the characters’ lives or in the overall story? Then think about what scenes you can construct to provide the most convincing and dramatic rendition of these crucial moments.

It is also useful to know about conventional narrative structure if you want to experiment with plot. Although a plot is the selection and arrangement of events to best serve the narrative, these events need not always be chronologically or logically related: they can be related thematically, or they can be dictated by the memory of the main character, or by the associative whims of your narrator.

You can create discontinuous narratives (Frank Moorhouse used this term to describe his early collections of fiction which consist of separate but interconnected or overlapping stories which can be read in any order); you can deliberately eschew any sort of narrative build-up or resolution (as in the stories of Raymond Carver); or you can experiment with structure as a crucial part of your plot.

A recent novel, *I, the Divine*, by Rabih Alameddine, is subtitled ‘a novel in first chapters’, because each chapter starts anew, creating a narrative by perpetually rewriting the causative situation. Other novels which experiment with structure include Charles Palliser’s *Betrayals* and Italo Calvino’s *If on a Winter’s Night a Traveler*.

**Character**

One of the most fundamental attractions of fiction is its rendering of character. It is this aspect that makes fiction closer to drama than to poetry. We like to know about people in real life, and we love to read about people in fiction. The challenge for us as writers is to make a character seem real, as complex and contradictory as people in real life. Do we narrate the story of the character’s life, showing how they develop and change, and choosing a few important moments to dramatise in detail (like the Victorian novel which tends to end with marriage or death)? Or do we present a few isolated, fairly mundane events which together will give the reader a picture of what that
character is like at a certain point in their life (like much minimalist fiction of the last few decades)?

There are many ways to suggest character. You can describe the physical appearance and clothing of characters, or their surroundings, such as their bedroom or office. Or you can provide an evaluative summary of their personality. This passage from Donna Tartt’s *The Secret History* is a good example of this sort of summary: ‘As it happened, I knew Gartrell. He was a bad painter and a vicious gossip, with a vocabulary composed almost entirely of obscenities, guttural verbs and the word “postmodernist”.’

This sort of commentary is good for sketching minor characters, but readers like to care for their main characters, and to do that we must see them develop and change, or at least be given the opportunity to change. The best way to achieve this is to think about putting your characters in situations and seeing how they react, seeing what decisions they make. For instance, the whole plot of Tim Winton’s *The Riders* is based on the choices made by the main character, Scully. Scully waits at the airport for his wife and daughter, but only the daughter turns up. His wife has disappeared. How will he react?

Characters are mostly revealed and developed through what they do and what they say: their actions and their dialogue. Perhaps the most important way to provide psychological depth to fictional characters is to describe their thoughts, and I will address this in the section entitled ‘Representing characters’ speech’.

**Narrative Voice**

When I use the word ‘voice’ here, I mean the voice of the story you are writing, not the voice of the author. All novels and short stories have a narrator, someone who relates the events of the story to the reader, and the decision you must make is: who is the best person to tell your story?

The narrator of your short story or novel will typically write or speak in the first person or in the third person. A first person narrator is a narrator who is also a character in the story he or she is narrating. Put simply, it is when the narrator uses the personal pronoun, ‘I’: ‘I woke up this morning and wondered what day it was.’ The third person narrator is a narrator who is not a character in the action and hence refers to the characters in the third person: ‘He ran down the
street. The business woman did not notice him as she stepped out onto the pavement. They bumped into each other.’

The language of your narrator will determine what tone and style you establish, and will often depend on what genre you are writing in (for instance, classic hardboiled crime fiction employs a tough and cynical first person narrator). The decisions you make about narrative voice will also depend on what point of view your narrator adopts.

**Point of View**
One of the most important decisions you will make when writing fiction is a decision about point of view. Point of view means which character’s eyes you are looking through when you are writing the story, what position you take in relation to the events being presented in your narrative, and therefore whose eyes the reader will be looking through. In fiction you can employ a range of different points of view: from single, to multiple, to shifting. Short stories usually stick to the one point of view throughout; but in novels the point of view can and often does shift from chapter to chapter.

To understand the importance of point of view in literature you only have to think about how it operates in life. Every guest at a wedding will have a different perspective of that event depending on their experience, a different opinion of what happened. The important question is: whose point of view is the most interesting?

Think about how a change in point of view would change an entire story. What if Vladimir Nabokov had written *Lolita* from the point of view of the girl, Dolly, and not the man, Humbert Humbert? In Charlotte Brontë’s *Jane Eyre*, the mad Mrs Rochester is never seen, but Jean Rhys decided to write a novel from the point of view of this silent character. *Wide Sargasso Sea* became an entirely new story, not just *Jane Eyre* from a different point of view.

**First Person Narrator**
What are the benefits of the first person narrator? There is an intimacy to this voice because the story is being told directly to the reader by one of the characters and from their own point of view. The raw confessionalism of Andrew McGahan’s first person narrator in *Praise* is one of the main sources of that book’s appeal. John Fowles’ *The
Collector is especially effective in the first person because the narrator is trying to explain and justify his crime to us, the readers. Most importantly, the first person narrator gives readers a real sense of the character’s voice by allowing an author to adopt the speech patterns and vocabulary of their character, sometimes with striking results, such as Peter Carey’s mimicking of Ned Kelly’s voice in True History of the Kelly Gang.

What are the drawbacks? A first person narrator does not know what other characters are thinking, can only give you their point of view. This can be restrictive. Also, it can be very difficult to imitate the voice of a character. If the character is similar to you then it might be easy. But for instance, if you’re a forty-year-old straight woman from Australia and you want to write a first person narrative from the point of view of a fourteen-year-old Nicaraguan boy who is ‘coming out’ about his homosexuality, it will be quite a feat to convince the reader that the ‘voice’ of the narrator is authentic, unless you have done a great deal of research.

In most stories and novels written in the first person, the narrator is the main character and everything radiates from his or her thoughts and perspective. Sometimes, however, a peripheral narrator is the more compelling device. Think of Sherlock Holmes stories. It is obvious that Sherlock Holmes is the main character, but all of his adventures are narrated in the first person by his offsider, Dr Watson. This keeps us at a distance from Holmes, making him more mysterious, and compels us to share Watson’s admiration for Holmes’s deductive capabilities.

Think, also, of Harper Lee’s To Kill a Mockingbird. Atticus Finch is the centre of this novel, but it is narrated in the first person from the point of view of his daughter Scout. Another good example of this device is Helen Garner’s short story, ‘The Life of Art’ (from her collection Postcards from Surfers), where the anonymous narrator provides a series of vignettes about ‘my friend’. It could be argued that although these narrators are not the main characters, they are not peripheral because they have an influence on the main character and contribute to some degree to the story. A more radical device would be to have a narrator who is merely an observer and not really a part of the action. An example of this type of narrator is Nick, from F. Scott Fitzgerald’s The Great Gatsby.
Some novels use multiple first person narrators, such as Mandy Sayer's *The Cross* or William Faulkner's *As I Lay Dying*. In Bret Easton Ellis' *The Rules of Attraction*, there are six or seven characters, most of them university students, who take on the role of narrator. The purpose of this is to capture the conflicting points of view and narrative voices of the students and their opinions on the various relationships between them.

We are not guided through these differing points of view by an overarching omniscient narrator, so we as readers must make up our own minds. For instance, one of the students talks in detail about the homosexual relationship he has with another student. Yet, whenever that student is the narrator there is no mention of this relationship, they are merely friends. One of them must be lying, and the point is that in real life all we can ever really know about other people's lives is what they tell us.

The device of differing perspectives on the same event is always effective because it establishes conflict. Simply giving us each character's opinion in order to provide a comprehensive account of an event is not enough reason to shift narrators; you need to play up this clash of perspectives. But if you are going to use multiple narrators, it is important that you work hard to capture the idiosyncratic speech patterns and vocabulary of the different characters in order to convince readers that they are indeed different.

**Third Person Narrator**

If you have a first person narrator, the point of view and the narrator's voice are from the same character. All events are focalised through that character's perspective, and the story is being narrated to us by that same character. In contrast, if you have a third person narrative, the point of view is the perspective of one or more of the characters, but the narrative voice—the voice in which the story is told—can be that of some unknown or disembodied narrator outside the action of the story. Some narrative voices are a blend of these two points of view.

Historically, the most common third person narrator is called the *omniscient narrator*, so named because it makes use of the original Renaissance comparison of the author with God. An *omniscient narrator* will typically give us the point of view of one or more
characters, describing their thoughts, their opinions, their perspective on events. This is crucial for helping readers identify with or understand characters. But the omniscient narrator also stands outside the action and therefore can go back and forth in time, can sum up the attributes of each character, pass evaluative judgement on their actions, give entire potted histories of their lives, and provide any information which the characters could not know. In short, this narrator is like god, looking down on this world of his creation and telling the reader whatever he thinks they should know.

When we read a novel written by an omniscient third person narrator, such as most of those written in the nineteenth century by authors such as Jane Austen, Charles Dickens or George Eliot, we simply accept their judgement of characters and their authority about what they are describing. For instance, when the narrator of Jane Austen’s *Mansfield Park* says in the opening page that ‘there are certainly not so many men of large fortune in the world, as there are pretty women to deserve them’, we are simply to take this as fact rather than as someone’s opinion. The same holds true when the narrator of *Persuasion* says: ‘Vanity was the beginning and the end of Sir Walter Elliot’s character.’

I have mentioned Jane Austen because a large part of her appeal is not just the characters she creates, but the character of the narrator herself: her witty observations, the elegant prolixity of her language, her ironic commentary on the characters and the society they inhabit. In contrast, the third-person narrator of modern novels is often much more blended with the perspective of the point-of-view character and does not know or tell anything that that character does not know. We call this an ‘effaced’ or ‘limited’ narrator, and I will discuss this type of narrator more in relation to the fiction of Henry James a little later in this chapter.

Gustave Flaubert’s *Madame Bovary*, published in 1857, is generally considered the first novel to be termed ‘modern’. Flaubert wrote in his correspondence, ‘an author in his book must be like god in his creation, everywhere present but nowhere visible.’ What Flaubert meant was that while readers have a sense that there is an author who has created a fictional world for us, they should be able to forget that there is a mediating presence between story and narration, they should forget that someone is telling them a story, and feel as if
they are simply being presented with a series of events so that they become lost in the experience.

It is commonly felt that authors need to follow the example of Flaubert and dramatise their fiction by presenting the action for readers, by showing readers all the sensory detail of a scene so their imaginations can be engaged. But authors do not have to sacrifice the personality of an omniscient narrator to achieve this. Michel Faber’s *Crimson Petal and the White* is an excellent example of an intrusive omniscient narrator who addresses the reader directly to guide us through a meticulously constructed Victorian London, yet at the same time enables us to become lost in a welter of concrete sensory description and engage with the characters.

**Third Person Limited Narrator**

The attempt by authors to efface the presence of the narrator to provide a perfect realism, as if the reader were simply watching the march of experience, reaches its height with Henry James. Much of James’ fiction employs what is called a *third person limited narrator*. By this I mean that the narrator is still not a character in the novel and therefore refers to the characters in the third person. But this narrator’s point of view is restricted to one character, to what James called a ‘centre of consciousness’. The narrator relates only what that character could know. In this way the narrator is invisible because we are given the character’s thoughts and perceptions and observations, but there is no external commentary. This is a way of retaining the intimate thoughts and personal perspective of a character, to put the reader in his or her position, but without having the character tell the story.

Another variant of the third person limited point of view is the *third person shifting point of view*. Here the narrator switches throughout from one character’s perspective to another, but each time is restricted to only what that character could know. A good example of this third person shifting narrator is *Regeneration* by Pat Barker. This is a way of gaining different perspectives without an overarching omniscient narrator.

Henry James wanted to refine the novel to the extent that he could dramatise a character’s consciousness rather than tell us what they were thinking. In the twentieth century writers like James Joyce
and Virginia Woolf followed James’ path into the subjective consciousness of characters, developing his interior monologues into the stream of consciousness. Note how the narrative segues into the direct thoughts of the main character in *Mrs Dalloway*:

> And then, thought Clarissa Dalloway, what a morning—fresh as if issued to children on a beach.
>
> What a lark! What a plunge! For so it had always seemed to her when, with a little squeak of the hinges which she could hear now, she had burst open the French windows and plunged at Bourton into the open air.4

**Objective Narrator**

If the desire to show rather than tell led some writers to develop a narrative voice which disappears into the thoughts of the characters, it led others to be as purely neutrally descriptive as possible from an external point of view, to let the action of a narrative simply unfold as if on a stage. The *objective narrator* is almost like a fly on the wall and relies solely on what could be physically observed by someone. In other words, an objective narrative is restricted to describing only action and dialogue. There are no excursions into the characters’ minds, no background or contextualising information given, no flashbacks or flash forwards, no summation or evaluation of character.

Ernest Hemingway’s short story, ‘Hills Like White Elephants’, is the classic example of this objective narrative, and such a perspective is well suited to his tough, declarative, journalistic prose. The invention of cinema no doubt influenced the development of this third person objective narrative voice, which is the closest prose approximation of the film script.

**Second Person Narrator**

Another fascinating, but relatively uncommon mode of narration is that of the second person. A second person narrator does not say, ‘I got home late’ or ‘John arrived home late’, it says, ‘you get home late’. In one sense it is like a substitute for the first person, as if the narrator is talking to themselves, telling themselves what they are doing. ‘You turn out the light, and climb into bed.’
Second person narratives always seem to be written in the present tense and this sometimes makes them seem like directions. ‘You can’t sleep. You toss and turn. You lie staring at the ceiling for hours. You get up and turn the light on.’ The other element to the second person, of course, is that it can feel like a direct address to the reader, drawing you into the narrative, making you complicit with the character, addressing you as the character.

Consider the opening to Frederick Barthelme’s short story, ‘Shopgirls’: ‘You watch the pretty salesgirl slide a box of Halston soap onto a low shelf, watch her braid slip off her shoulder, watch like an adolescent as the vent at the neck of her blouse opens slightly –.’ Jay McInerney’s *Bright Lights, Big City* is an entire novel written in the second person and it is worth reading just for this achievement, as is Nikki Gemmell’s more recent *The Bride Stripped Bare*.

### Representing Characters’ Speech

A work of fiction typically has at least two levels of language: the descriptive or evaluative language of the narrative voice; and the speech and thoughts of characters. How you manage the interrelation between these two levels is important to the rhythm and the complexity of your writing. Here are three ways in which a narrator can represent the speech and/or thoughts of a character:

1. **Direct speech:**
   
   ‘I’m going to be late for my bloody meeting’, she said.

2. **Indirect speech:**
   
   She told the taxi driver she was going to be late for her meeting.

3. **Free indirect speech (or thought):**
   
   She sat forward impatiently. She was going to be late for her bloody meeting. He laughed and continued to dawdle under forty.

*Direct speech* is the straightforward recording of characters’ dialogue. There are quotation marks to let us know that it is the character speaking and not the narrator, and there is what is called a tag clause to identify the speaker. This tag clause is important so we don’t get confused about who is speaking. It is generally as simple as ‘she said’ and ‘he said’. And in most cases, this is all you need. Sometimes, though, we get bored with writing he said/she said all the time, and
try for some variety, or we don't trust readers to pick up the tone of the dialogue so we come up with fancy tag clauses: 'I'm going to be late for my meeting', she said / she observed / she exclaimed / she lamented / she complained / she shouted / she blurted / she cried, with a hint of panic / she pointed out sarcastically. It is really best to leave it up to the reader to pick up the tone of a character's speech from the type of words you choose to put in the line of dialogue, and from the context of the conversation.

In the example of indirect speech above you will notice we retain the gist of what the character says, but there is a shift from the first person to the third person, and there are no quotation marks. We know that she has said this because there is a tag clause, but instead of being reported directly we are told second hand by the narrator what she said. This is a device we use in everyday speech because we do not have quotation marks at our disposal. Writers tend to use indirect speech when they want to get information across but they don't want to report every single piece of dialogue. It can also be used for dramatic effect: ‘You're the woman of my dreams’, said John. Claire smiled and said she was going up to the shops to buy some milk.

Sometimes an entire short story will be told in indirect speech, the main effect of which is a heavily ironic tone. The following is an extract from 'Up the River with Mrs Gallant' by Barbara Anderson:

Mr Levis invited them to call him Des. And this is Arnold he said.

Mr Kent said Hi Arnold.
Mrs Kent said that she was pleased to meet him.
Mrs Gallant said Hullo, Arnold.
Mr Gallant said Good morning.
Mr Borges said nothing.
Des said that if they just liked to walk down to the landing stage Arnold would bring the boat down with the tractor.
Mrs Gallant said wasn't Mr Gallant going to leave the car in the shade.
Mr Gallant said that if Mrs Gallant was able to tell him where the shade was going to be for the next six hours he would be happy to.
Free indirect speech is the most sophisticated way of representing speech or thought. You will notice in my example of it, above, that it has no tag clause, nothing to indicate that the character has spoken. One way of describing this is that the passage is a hybrid of the narrator's voice and the character's. The narrator has absorbed the character's speech into his or her narration, yet retained the particular idiom ('bloody') of the character.

Last Exit to Brooklyn by Hubert Selby Jr. is a great example of the sustained use of free indirect discourse. Here is the opening paragraph:

They sprawled along the counter and on the chairs. Another night. Another drag of a night in the Greeks, a beatup all night diner near the Brooklyn Armybase. Once in a while a doggie or seaman came in for a hamburger and played the jukebox. But they usually played some goddam hillbilly record. They tried to get the Greek to take those records off, but he'd tell them no. They come in and spend money. You sit all night and buy nothing. Are yakiddin me Alex? Ya could retire on the money we spend in here. Scatah. You don't pay my carfare ...

In one paragraph the narrator adopts a range of voices—the idiomatic language of Alex and the youths ('they'), as well as the descriptive language of a third person narrator—to orient us within the yabbering diner.

Free indirect discourse (that is, indirect speech or thought) also allows the narrator to virtually disappear into a character's mind, yet still retain some narrative distance. This device is useful for tracing the process of a character's thoughts, to show the thoughts rather than tell readers what the character is thinking. Here is a passage from Tim Winton's The Riders which employs free indirect discourse to trace the interior monologue of the protagonist, Scully:

The flickering monitor said the Aer Lingus flight from London would land in a minute or two. What timing! They'd be tired after the twenty Qantas hours from Perth and the wait at Heathrow. He'd cook them lunch, stoke the fire and

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put them to bed with the wind rattling outside. Hell, he’d climb in with them, sleep or no sleep. He wondered if he could find a decent bottle of wine somewhere in this country before dark. Not on a Sunday.\(^7\)

Free indirect discourse is also highly effective in creating irony because it establishes a gap between a character’s point of view and an omniscient narrator’s point of view, between the narrator’s representation of a character and the character’s representation of themselves. In this extract from Patrick Suskind’s *Perfume*, it is obvious that Father Terrier is being satirised, even though it is his own sentiments and language being relayed by the narrator:

Father Terrier was an educated man. He had not merely studied theology, but had read the philosophers as well, and had dabbled with botany and alchemy on the side. He had a rather high opinion of his own critical faculties. To be sure, he would never go so far as some—who questioned the miracles, the oracles, the very truth of Holy scripture—even though the biblical texts could not, strictly speaking, be explained by reason alone, indeed often directly contradicted it.\(^8\)

The maintenance of an ironic distance between narrator’s language and character’s thoughts or utterances is the most sophisticated use of free indirect discourse, and Jane Austen is one of the best exponents of this irony.

**Description**

This is a very broad term because in a sense all writing is description, whether it is of a character or a place, or an event. In this section I will talk specifically about description of place. Just say you open a story with the line: ‘Jane walked into the restaurant.’ Now obviously you have set up a scene in which something will happen in the restaurant. But you also want to give the reader a sense of what the restaurant is like. You want them to see it, to feel its atmosphere, you want to describe it. But how much information do you give?
Do you say it was crowded? Or do you say there were thirty or forty people seated at tables? Do you say there were thirty-seven customers and four waiters? Are the waiting staff wearing loose, open-necked shirts or blouses? Do you tell readers about the white tablecloths? The fan that twirls slowly overhead? The paintings decorating the walls?

You quickly realise that you can’t simply represent the whole restaurant in the way a photo or a film would. But even then, a wide shot of the restaurant wouldn’t necessarily show you everything in detail, and a series of close-ups would start to suggest that certain things are significant. In other words you have to make a choice about the mood you want to evoke, and about what is important for readers to know.

Perhaps you want to be more evaluative in your description:

Jane walked into the restaurant. It had that air of bleached pretension peculiar to expensive Sydney restaurants. As if the minimalist décor and antiseptic gleam were designed to approximate the atmosphere of an inner city art gallery. Waitresses glided airily between the tables as if they were on a catwalk, their mouths fixed in a liminal expression between supercilious smile and patronising sneer. Couples chatted to each other on mobile phones from across the table and picked at tiny packages of nouveau cuisine abandoned by the chef on oversized plates. (Paul Dawson)

Whichever way you choose to describe a scene, the key is to be selective. Sometimes one line of description which captures the feeling of a place is more effective than a minute detailing of every physical characteristic. If you use metaphor, don’t necessarily think about it as a means for attaining accuracy. Think about what effect it will have on readers, about how it is significant to the story. For instance, if you say that the streetlamp oozed a cloudy light onto the street, you’re not just saying this is really what it is like, you’re introducing a slightly sinister aspect to the scene. The opening to chapter two of Margaret Atwood’s *The Handmaid’s Tale* is an excellent example of the use of description to render character and establish the narrative.
‘Life Writing’ Fiction

Many writers, and most beginning writers, draw upon their own lives when writing fiction. Some do not feel confident about stretching their imagination beyond their own experience, and feel that their writing will be more convincing if it stems from what they know. Some are motivated by a desire to depict the social arena which they inhabit; consider David Lodge’s satirical campus novels, or recent ‘grunge’ fiction. Others feel that the story of their life is a story worth telling.

Considering the huge popularity and commercial success of memoirs in the last decade, such as Frank McCourt’s *Angela’s Ashes*, the desire to relate one’s life story is probably most profitably explored in this form of creative non-fiction. Nonetheless, even a memoir must be selective in the events it relates, must develop a strong narrative, and must create compelling scenes, all of which are aspects of fiction writing.

If you choose to draw upon your own experience, or even model your main character on yourself, it is still important to remember that you are writing fiction. In other words, you should not feel restrained by any compulsion to tell things as they happened, to remain scrupulously faithful to the events of your life. Such a conviction typically encourages writers to include scenes or narratorial commentary which are superfluous to the plot. Or to forgo interesting dramatic developments for the sake of ‘accuracy’.

Think about your novel or short story as an adaptation of your life, in the way a book must undergo certain changes in order to be translated to the medium of film. You may have the material for a piece of fiction, but you still need to turn your story into a plot, consider which point of view to adopt, establish your narrative voice, develop characters and create concrete descriptions. To guide you in this process of adaptation, think about how your personal experiences might resonate with readers by capturing a common experience, and how your experiences might relate to wider social concerns.

Some good examples of novels that achieve this are Helen Garner’s *Monkey Grip* (which affectionately depicted communal inner-city living in the seventies) and Andrew McGahan’s *Praise* (which explored the anxieties of unemployment and male sexuality).
Finally, it is worth remembering that, as these authors have attested, those around you may not appreciate your honest account of their lives in a work of fiction. The responsibility incumbent upon writers in this situation is worth considering.

**Conclusion**

It is important not to see fiction as separate from the other forms of prose discussed in this book—as entertainment, perhaps, rather than information or argument. Fiction is one type of writing, albeit a culturally privileged one, alongside others such as journalism, advertising, correspondence and technical writing.

This approach will prevent you from thinking literature is all about ‘fine’ writing with florid metaphors and overblown themes. Literature is constituted by the same material with which we communicate in daily life: language. The special quality of fiction is that it absorbs all types of language into the narrative voice of the story. Most stories obviously draw upon everyday speech when reporting dialogue, but a narrator’s language is also often a hybrid of social languages.

For example, the narrator of Toby Litt’s short story, ‘Map-Making among the Middle Classes’, ironically employs the language of advertising for descriptive purposes when he introduces one of the characters with this line: ‘Michael Xut, 40, was an award-winning neo-minimalist architect and interior designer.’ The narrator of Gail Jones’ short story, ‘On the Piteous Death of Mary Wollstonecraft’, juxtaposes passages of lyrical description with paragraphs such as this, which combines authorial commentary with historical and medical language:

She is about to die, this Mary Wollstonecraft. Born in the year of 1759, she will die at thirty-eight of post-partum complications. She is the controversial and august author of A Vindication of the Rights of Women. Both famous and feminist in her own uncongenial time. Large-minded. Brave. Of gravity and of substance.

Everyday language, which we hear and read around us through a range of media, has been a constant source of innovation for writers
of fiction. Like the fiction of Dean Kiley, a short story can be composed of a chatty anecdotal first person narrative interspersed with a series of emails (‘So Then I Said to Helen’\textsuperscript{11}), or it can be a combination of newspaper articles, court transcripts, essayistic musings, poems and footnotes (‘I Panicked so I Hit Him with a Brick’\textsuperscript{12}).

Literature does not exist in an autonomous aesthetic realm. It is more important than that. Literature is one of the myriad discourses which organise our way of thinking and acting in the world; it is vitally connected with the social world because it engages with the language(s) which we all use in daily life. When writing a short story or a novel, think not only about how you can create a good story, or express your ideas, but also about how fiction is, like all other forms of prose, an active participant in public discourse.

Further Reading

Notes
1  Tartt, p. 70.
2  Austen, p. 4.
3  Flaubert, p. 319.
4  Woolf, p. 4.
5  Anderson, p. 468.
6  Selby, p. 3.
7  Winton, p. 89.
9  Litt, p. 61.
10  Jones, p. 105.
12  Kiley, 1995, p. 70.
Corporate writing includes writing for the public relations, advertising and corporate communications field. Is corporate writing simply propaganda? Many people think so. I have heard from more than one person that advertising is ‘making people buy stuff they don’t need’, while public relations is ‘trying to tell people what your company does and pretending it is good at it.’

It is easy to be cynical about corporate writing. This is because those who do not work in the field notice only flashy, materialistic advertising or flippant public relations stunts. But for every semi-naked teen or twenty-something, of either gender, reclining on or near a bed, promoting jeans or designer underwear, there is an advertisement aimed at removing the stigma of mental health. For every superficial publicity stunt at the opening of a boutique pub, there is a press tour of a new wing of a hospital.

Corporate writing is a means of communicating with your target audience. It could be in the form of a webpage or Facebook site, a television advertisement, a media release sent to a local newspaper, or a newsletter for company staff. It serves a purpose. It informs, it provides people with choices, and it keeps your audience up-to-date.

Successful people and successful organisations are often those that communicate effectively. What would a relationship be like if a
couple never spoke to each other? What would happen if they never let each other understand what they were doing in their life and what they required to keep the relationship alive? The relationship would die.

Organisations must talk with other people. They must talk to their staff, their shareholders and investors, their suppliers and the people who purchase or use their products or services.

Corporate writers are people who use their writing skill to help deliver the organisation's message. But you do not need to be working as a professional corporate writer, copy writer or public relations practitioner to use simple, effective corporate writing techniques. You could be promoting a community event or a play by a local theatre group. Perhaps you are a music teacher or language teacher wanting to advertise your services? Or a club secretary or president who wants to be able to talk to members on a regular basis?

There are many different methods and tools a writer can use to communicate effectively with their audience—too many for just one chapter. The following are some of the more popular methods you can use to help aid communication. If you are a professional corporate writer, some of the suggestions may help improve the way you write. Either way, your audience is out there, and you need to maximise your chances of getting your message to them, and enticing them to read it.

**Writing Media Releases**
The media release, also called a press release or news release, is a news story supplied to the media. It should, ideally, resemble a news report as seen in the newspaper or on TV or heard on the radio. You don't usually recognise when a news report has emanated from a press release (unless a program like the ABC’s *Media Watch* blows their cover!), and that is the whole idea.

Media releases can be the bane of a journalist or editor's life. Why? Because they are inundated with them. Every day a pile ends up on a newspaper or magazine editor's desk. Editors are busy people. They do not have time to sit back and read each and every media release at their leisure.

Typically, editors read only the first line or paragraph of a media release. The decision to bin it or use it is decided in the first dozen or
so words. How do you get the attention of a tired and jaded editor who has read 50 releases in the last hour?

You’ve read about the ‘word byte’ factor in the other chapters. By now, it’s a given that you will write in that way. But, as with all the different genres, the media release will need its own essential contents.

First, ensure that your media release contains news. What is news? News is information not already known to a recipient. It can be about anything that interests the reader—recent events or developments, or information about products. The test of a media release, as far as an editor, producer or journalist is concerned, is that it must be something that their readers/listeners will pause to read or listen to.

Second, write the media release well, and stay ‘on genre’. The easiest way to do this is to study newspapers and see how they are written. Imagine what would happen if a busy journalist likes the story but doesn’t have the space. If the editor edits your media release down to the first paragraph, will readers learn anything new from your story? If you can’t answer ‘yes’ to this question, go back and redraft your media release.

A well-tried formula for writing a good media release, according to Frank Jefkins and Daniel Yadid, is the ‘SOLAADS formula’. The acronym SOLAADS is formed by the initials of the word of each section:

1 Subject—what is the story about?
2 Organisation—what is the name of the organisation or event?
3 Location—where is the organisation or event located?
4 Advantages—what is new, what are the benefits? Why should the editor or reader care about the story? What is the singular most important bit of news behind the story?
5 Applications—how can you apply information about the story to the news release? For example, if you are announcing the launch of a lightweight laptop, the computer will best suit travellers or business people on the move who don’t want to carry heavy laptop computers.
6 Details—what are the sizes, colours, prices, performance figures, times, names or other details? These are very specific details only those really interested in the news would want to read.
7 Source—what is the source of the information and where can the journalist go to get more?
The first sentence or paragraph should contain the ‘subject’, the second the ‘organisation’, the third the ‘location’ and so on.

Don’t waste time writing clever headlines: write a header that’s informative. All releases must be dated and proofed carefully. A wrong address for an event or a misspelled product name can be disastrous. Often media releases are written in a great hurry and the finer details are overlooked.

Writing Style
Following are some style tips on writing media releases:
1 Resist all temptation to write a media release as you would write an advertisement, as it destroys the validity of a news story. Keep any subjective opinions (‘This will be the biggest thing to hit Australia in years!’) out of the release unless it’s a quote from a spokesperson of the organisation you are writing about (but see point 6 below).
2 Use short paragraphs, short sentences and short words.
3 Try to keep to one page (about 350 words) if possible.
4 Avoid adjectives and superlatives such as ‘The world’s biggest’, ‘The renowned’, or ‘The prestigious’.
5 Avoid overused words such as ‘unique’ and ‘innovative’.
6 Do not put in a quote unless the person quoted has something original to say.

Presentation
Here are some tips on presentation:
1 Use headed paper containing contact details.
2 Use a heading not a headline.
3 Sub headings are generally unnecessary and should be avoided.
4 Do not write company or product names entirely in capitals or bold, as this irritates.
5 Do not use capitals for job titles.
6 Nothing should be underlined.
7 One to nine should be in words, ten onwards in figures.
8 Avoid using ‘recently’ as the usually implies stale news. It’s better to put the exact date.
9 Indicate continuation overleaf if necessary.
Delivery
Media releases that are emailed, faxed or posted do not often reach their destination. You can always give the recipient a polite telephone call to ask if they received the release. Occasionally you will encounter an exasperated and overworked editor who has better things to do than remember the contents of your media release. The majority are happy enough to acknowledge your release and will often tell you if they want to follow up or use the release.

Every time I send a media release out on behalf of a client at least one editor or journalist says they have not seen it or can not remember it. I give a brief spiel on the telephone and this will often interest the editor. The ‘lost’ media release can then often be subsequently used. Never give up on a release until the editor says ‘no’.

Newsletters and Journals
If you work for a large company or belong to an organisation such as a union, a charity or a sporting or special interest club, there is a good chance you receive a newsletter or journal keeping you up-to-date with news and events. Or you might be the person in that organisation who writes the newsletter.

Hardcopy newsletters traditionally consisted of two or more pages. Now, in the information society, they are much more likely to be an email newsletter or e-zine.

When I worked in a public relations consultancy, nearly every one of my clients published their own newsletter. They consisted of staff newsletters for a hospital, industry news for an LP Gas company, a newsletter for members of a large department store ‘loyalty card’ scheme, and a monthly newsletter for a local council that was sent to residents.

The writing style used for each newsletter was very different. The newsletter written for staff (an ‘internal’ newsletter) contained jargon and technical terms that the ordinary person would probably not understand. In this case it was medical terms such as ‘diagnostic facilities’ and ‘the endoscopy suite’. There was no explanation of these terms. There was a presumption that the staff understood medical terms.

A newsletter written for residents on behalf of a council is different. It is very important to avoid jargon so your message is
understood. Terms such as ‘best practice’ and ‘one-stop shop’ need to be explained or, even better, removed. It is easy to lapse into using jargon if you use technical terms daily in your job. If this is the case it might be a good idea to revisit the introduction to this book and read about how managerial language is death to good writing.

The main focus of most internal newsletters is on the accomplishments of individuals, or of the organisation. Internal newsletters will often highlight a department or individual that has accomplished a task to a high standard: a team within a sporting club that has won a premiership, or the IT department that won a new contract for the organisation.

External newsletters may be promotional, highlighting for example exclusive offers to members of a department store loyalty scheme. Or they may be informative. Upcoming events and meetings will also be a focus.

No matter what type of newsletter you are preparing, following some simple rules will give you a professional and easily read manuscript:

1. The newsletter of a government department or authority or a professional association needs to look professional, with a formal writing style. Avoid the use of colloquialisms, overt humour or flippancy.

2. Internal newsletters can be more relaxed, as they are normally only read by staff. Some will have wedding and baby news, or a lighthearted staff vox pop or gossip column. Newsletters for consumer goods can also have a ‘chatty’ style, depending on their audience.

3. Never make fun of the company or association you are writing for.

4. The writing style needs to be very crisp, brief and heavily edited. Think ‘word bytes’. You cannot waffle or overwrite articles. Put the key elements of a story into the opening sentence and build the story up from there. Always check and double check your work. Newsletters represent the image and integrity of a company or organisation. Respect this.

5. Headings, names and dates seem to provide the most fertile ground for errors. There is nothing worse than receiving a
newsletter back from the printers to discover a blatant spelling mistake or dozens of phone calls from irate staff members because the company picnic was advertised with the wrong date. And if you are going to spell a staff member’s name wrong, make sure it is not the CEO’s.

Readers with specialised knowledge will always catch you out if you make a mistake. Ask someone else with a good knowledge of the topic to proofread all your articles.

**Writing Advertising Copy for Print or Pixels**

Often an audience does not realise they are reading the work of a corporate writer. They do not know that an article in a daily newspaper was taken from a media release prepared by a public relations consultant. Nor that an impassioned speech by a federal politician had been drafted by a speech writer or media coordinator.

This ‘ignorance’ cannot be claimed when it comes to an audience’s view of advertising. The people who write ‘ads’, the copywriters have more of their work read, heard or seen than any best selling author or film director. Think of the number of internet advertisements, television commercials, billboards and magazine advertisements you see every day. A few dozen? More like a hundred—at least.

Does advertising really make people buy what they don’t need? No. It’s not that powerful. Advertising is about selling ideas and is limited to persuasion. An advertisement stimulates people to act. This action could be to purchase a new brand of cheese, to drive safely at night or to get on a plane and fly to Tahiti for half price. The advertiser cannot make someone do this. They can only persuade them.

Advertisements work most powerfully on an emotional level. Remember the discussion of ‘pathos’ in Chapter 4. Emotional appeals are particularly important for luxury consumer products. Could you try to rationalise the purchase of a luxury sports car or a fridge with internet capabilities? It would be difficult. Far better to try to stir the emotions of an individual with images of freedom, individualism, happiness and fulfilment.

Advertising is also about positioning a product or organisation. If there are two similar products exactly the same, how can we
differentiate them? Take two well-known cola drinks, Pepsi and Coca-Cola. They taste slightly different, but they are essentially the same product. Yet their images are very different, all thanks to advertising.

Advertising copy must be dynamic enough to make people act. Read the copy in magazine advertisements. Sometimes it consists of a simple headline. Copy for fashion brands is typical of this. What more can you say about perfumes? Also, the image is very important. It sums up the brand. If a perfume is called ‘Freedom’ or ‘Safari’ or ‘Opium’ the image must complement the brand.

Typically a print ad also consists of a paragraph or two of body copy. It is here that you back up the claims made in the headline and expand on why the audience should act. Most sentences in the body copy consist of less than a dozen words. The copy must be suited for a two second glance—a ‘word byte’ indeed.

Take the whole-page print ad for the new Peugot 308. There are just nine words in the copy line (headline): ‘Something just as exciting as the car. The price.’ Below that is a picture of the car. Underneath the car there is more copy, about the car’s main features, but this print is much smaller than the headline and in white on the sepia background, not large and bold like the headline. The headline is typical of ads for cars, which frequently use emotional, dynamic, exciting copy. They want you to feel good about their car. The engine specs and tank capacity come later.

Visuals often stand alone from the copy, and vice versa. When writing a copy line for a visual, think: if you separate the copy from the image would viewers and readers understand the ad? You must read the copy and look at the visual to unify the message. Otherwise the copy or the visual is generally ignored.

‘In five days you’ll feel 100%.’ An ad for a medicine? A health retreat? No. Air New Zealand promoting a five day holiday. The image of a woman bounding from rock to rock on a pristine coastline gives a clue as to which country it is.

‘The Perfect Aussie Beer? It’s all in Your Head.’ Obviously an ad for a beer. But it is not until you see the fine head of beer in a glass of Hahn Premium that you understand the play on words.

Some copy will be text heavy. Often a text-heavy advertisement is called an advertorial. This is paid space in a magazine or newspaper, made to look like an article. Often an advertorial accompanies
a special ‘lift out’ or promotion on a country, a service or a specific product (for example, computers or children’s day care).

Advertorials should be written so they read like an article. Use topic sentences at the start of each paragraph, quotes from relevant sources and captioned photographs.

Regardless of the amount of copy you are writing, a corporate writer cannot afford to waste a single word. If a word is clunky, nonsensical, or just plain boring—the opposite of a ‘word byte’—you will lose your readers, they will simply stop reading. That means the message, and the cost of attempting to communicate this message, is lost too.

Tips for Writing Copy
Here are some tips for writing good advertising copy for print or pixels:
1. The headline should use short, simple words, usually no more than ten.
2. The headline should outline the primary benefit or promise of the product or service.
3. The headline should contain an active verb (remember what you learnt in Chapter 2?).
4. The headline should not be obscure, it should relate to and unify the message in the image and body copy.
5. Know your audience and the media you are proposing to use very well before you write the copy.
6. Use copy that is concise, sharp and poignant—‘word byte’ material.
7. Make sure the body copy expands the promise of the headline.

Writing Speeches
Speech writing is one of the corporate writing tasks that requires the most attention to detail. All ears are open when a CEO, government minister or keynote speaker stands at the lectern. There is nothing more satisfying for the writer than a well presented informative, inspiring or energetic speech. Conversely, a flat and boring speech or a speech containing factual errors, can come back to haunt the speaker, and thus, the writer.

One difficulty when preparing a speech for another person is attempting to get the words to match the individual. You need to
know the speaker. Are they tough, caring, funny, inspiring or dramatic? The audience should be able to connect the speaker with their words. If the speech does not suit the speaker, the words ring hollow.

The audience is also important. If they all work in a particular field or come from a common interest group such as a cricket club, a government department or a history club, technical terms and industry jargon can be used. Otherwise avoid it.

Use simple language and short, sharp sentences that won’t make the speaker run out of breath. If the speech is for the general public, or for an event where the speaker is one of several, keep the speech short. Keynote speeches are longer, sometimes reaching twenty minutes. It is difficult for the audience to concentrate on a speech which is read, so keep it as short as possible.

As a guide one page of double spaced text will take approximately one minute to read. If you make the text larger (which is recommended), say 16 point text, the time is halved. If your speaker is inexperienced you can include basic nonverbal cues in the speech, for example a (pause) to indicate a pause in the speech.

Before you start writing the speech, make sure you do your research. Gather more information than necessary so you can prune the speech to suit. A lack of research can result in information that is overly broad and result in sweeping, general statements. Statistics, facts and figures, anecdotes and illustrations can make a speech poignant and relevant to an audience (see Chapter 13 on how to research carefully).

Writers may be tempted to include doses of humour in a speech. This is a minefield. Nothing falls flatter than a joke delivered by a speaker without a sense of comic timing. Anecdotes and personal stories are usually safer.

All speeches have an introduction, a main body and a conclusion. It is good to start the speech with a bang. Get the audience listening with an interesting quote or an unusual fact. The introduction should also sum up the contents of the speech, so it is best to write the introduction last. That way you have fleshed out the speech and have a good idea of the theme and its most important point/s.

The main body should contain no more than three main points. Each main point will have one to three sub points. Do not confuse the audience. Each point should flow naturally, not jump back and
forward between each point. Provide examples or anecdotes for each of your sub points. This will give your audience an opportunity to understand the concept or ideas behind your speech.

Many is the time a speaker stumbles over difficult, long words or the pronunciation of names. Make it easy for your speaker by using phonetics where necessary. For example, instead of writing ‘may I say the rhododendrons look particularly nice, Ms Muillitar’ write ‘may I say the ro-do-den-drons look particularly nice, Ms Mu-illi-tar.’

Finally, read the speech aloud to yourself several times. This will help pick up awkward sentence structure and speech patterns, maudlin passages that could be edited or deleted and any spelling mistakes.

**Further Reading**
The Elephant in the Room

Let’s start by tackling (thankfully only metaphorically) the elephant in the room. Yes, this is a book, a relative dinosaur of the modern technology world, and this is a chapter in a book about ... writing for the web.

The irony hasn't escaped me either.

I won’t lie and claim that everything you will ever need to know about writing online is contained in this chapter. I don’t believe you’re that gullible anyway.

Instead, think of this chapter as a handy little starter’s guide to writing for the web. I’ve split the chapter into three easy sections, and then I’ve further divided those sections up into manageable chunks of text for the hungry ‘informavores’ among you to snack on (don’t worry, you’ll read a bit more about ‘informavores’ in the ‘Think before You Type’ section).

First, we’ll look at how thinking a little before we begin typing can help make our online writing more effective. In the second section we’ll outline and discuss some core areas and key skills you can focus on to improve your online writing, and in the third section I’ll get you thinking about ways you can already begin to establish yourself as a writer online.
Wherever I can, I’ll provide you with the links to great printed texts and online resources (sites and blogs) that will expand on the points I’ve made and challenge you to explore online writing further. By the end of this short chapter you’ll have a strong grasp of some of the major concepts that underpin and inform online writing, you’ll be introduced to the key skills all online writers should be practising and you should have the confidence and knowledge to begin writing online.

Where you go from there is up to you.

So Why Even Bother Writing Online?

It’s Democratic
In the time it takes you to read this chapter (assuming you do!), a torrent of new information will have been published online:

- 195 hours of video uploaded to YouTube
- 9375 blog posts published
- 31 250 Tweets Twittered
- 1 gazillion Facebook statuses updated

Okay, so I fudged the last statistic, but only because I couldn’t find anyone keeping count of Facebook status updates. Amazingly, the other stats are all current as of the writing of this chapter. Sadly for this book, they will all be hopelessly out of date by the time you read this, but that just emphasises how fast the online environment is changing, and how much content is being published every minute on the web.

What these stats ably demonstrate is that when it comes to writing for the web, anyone can do it—and they probably are! You don’t need an agent or a book deal to get your writing online and you don’t have to know the publisher’s uncle. There really isn’t a more democratic publishing medium, so for writers starting out, the web is a great place to write regularly and attract readers.

It’s Diverse
Whether you want to write the next great literary masterpiece or chat with a customer about their experience of using your company’s
product, the web is home to a wide variety of different opportunities for writers to roll up their sleeves and get stuck in. In the final section we’ll look more closely at some of the many different online spaces where writers who understand the principles behind great online writing are in high demand.

**It’s Downright Cheap**

As I mentioned before, the barriers to entry in book publishing can be pretty high. Not so online though. A great deal of the web publishing platforms most commonly used today cost nothing to use, and require very little technical ability (read: geek skills). And with almost no limit to the number of pages you can publish, you won’t have to worry about printing costs.

So that’s just some of the good news. The web is democratic, diverse and downright cheap.

On the flipside, however, it is precisely the democratic nature of the web that can make it a rather daunting place to start your writing career. With so much already out there and even more published every minute, how can you ensure that your writing stands out from the impossibly noisy crowd?

The answer is simple: read the rest of this short chapter and begin applying the tactics and skills we discuss in your own web writing. Check out the links included to even more interesting articles and blog posts, and be patient. One of the great things about writing online is that you can do it often, and you can test what works for you and what doesn’t.

Ultimately, you should write online because you enjoy it. And in my experience, the better you get, the more enjoyable it becomes.

So let’s get started.

**Think before You Type**

For anyone who has ever decided, in a moment of drunken, romantic sincerity, to text message an ex or potential boyfriend or girlfriend and profess in 140 mangled characters an expression of undying love, you will know the importance of thinking before you decide to write.

Indeed, just because the web has low barriers to entry for writers, this does not mean we should just wade into writing online without considering a few things first. A little thinking and research
before you type will help you to write compelling online content, containing a good percentage of those all-important ‘word bytes’, with a much better chance of cutting through the noisy online publishing environment and connecting with your audience.

**Studying the ‘Informavores’: Writing with the Web Reader in Mind**

In Peter Pirolli’s book *Information Foraging Theory: Adaptive Interaction with Information* (2007), he discusses how online, readers don’t feast on writing, but how they forage for content to read. Pirolli uses scientific usability analysis to draw the conclusion that online readers are like grazing dinosaurs—the ‘informavores’—in terms of the way they consume content.

Online ‘Informavore’ readers are looking for the scent of compelling content when they arrive on your website, and they don’t want to search long and hard for tasty ‘word bytes’ on which to snack. As a writer you need to ensure that the vocabulary you use in major headings, navigational menus and in article headlines is as clear and informational as possible. We’ll discuss headlines in a little more depth later on.

Once the content-hungry ‘informavore’ has caught the scent of ‘word bytes’ in catchy headlines and clear website navigation labels, there has to be a pay-off for the ravenous beast. The rest of your writing should be nutritious and easy to access. As much as possible, once the ‘informavore’ has sniffed the possibility of a good feed, you want that hungry reader to spend as much time on your site as possible, gorging themselves on great content.

If you are writing for a business, your ability to convince content-hungry readers to spend time on your site and to come back to your site again and again for great ‘word bytes’ to consume, represents increased website traffic and therefore probably increased advertising revenue or increased sales (depending on how you make money on your business website). So understanding the feeding/reading habits of hungry ‘informavores’/readers is a key part of successful—and profitable—web writing.

There is a wealth of literature, both online and offline, dedicated to understanding the exact reading habits of people online. There’s no time to go into too much depth here, but there are a few key trends to recognise about the way readers consume content on the web. For
more about this research, follow the links I provide at the end of this chapter.

- ‘Informavores’ don’t read online, they scan—research shows that only 16 per cent of online users read content word-by-word. We look more closely at how you can write content that is scannable in ‘Key Skills for the Online Writer’ section.
- ‘Informavores’ are a busy bunch, so don’t waste their time—online users are looking for content they can snack on and use quickly. Traditional print publishing is often happy to include narrative devices to embellish the storytelling process, but online readers are more likely to be on a mission to find something specific. Cut out the unnecessary story and get to the point online—web readers want actionable content. Once again, we discuss this a bit more in the next section.
- ‘Informavores’ aren’t binge eaters—online readers tend to snack on shorter content rather than gorge themselves on lengthy text. Research by usability expert Jakob Nielsen confirms that online, readers only read around 20 per cent of the words on the page, and that this figure decreases exponentially as the length of the text increases. Put simply, keep your text online nice and short.

For much more on this topic of research into online reading patterns, a great starting point is the selection of different articles to be found in the further reading section at the end of this chapter. You’ll also get a chance to read more about scannable text and the length of text online in the next section.

**Getting to Know You: Learn to Listen to Your Audience**

Now we know something about the general reading habits of online users, it’s worth considering ways we can get to know our audience online more intimately. The better we understand our audience when we write—whether online or off—the better we are likely to be able to engage them, entertain them and inform them.

The great news is that it has never been easier to find out about your audience. If you write for a targeted niche audience, as I did when working as online editor for www.marketingmagazine.com.au, a good strategy is to search through Google for competitor sites to yours.
By looking at the content that has already been written online by competitors’ sites and other related sites, you can already gain a feel for the type of content your target audience might be interested in.

One thing the web does better than any other medium, is allow for your audience to express themselves through forums, blog comments and the like. If you are trying to listen to your potential audience, a great place to start is in relevant online forums and in the comments of relevant blogs. The more you listen to your audience, the better chance you have of writing content that is directly relevant to them.

Of course, listening to your audience doesn’t only have to take place online. Spend time thinking about everywhere that your target audience might congregate to share information and stories. So if your target audience is Australian sports fans (as it is with Sports Hydrant, the sports social network of which I am now community manager) you should spend time listening to those sports fans wherever they are. So that includes at the local footy oval and outside the swimming pool, as well as on Facebook Groups and in website forums.

It’s also important before you start writing to identify whether your content will have only a local audience. The internet means that your writing may be found by readers all across the world, so you need to write and edit accordingly.

There is increasingly a great opportunity for you to develop a strong relationship with your audience when writing online. More and more companies are opening themselves up to their audiences and engaging in conversations with their customers through channels like blogs and micro-blogs (Twitter).

To succeed in maintaining an online relationship through your writing correspondence with your customers, it is becoming increasingly important for writers to listen carefully to their audience before they start to type. Remember, with so much being published every day, you want to ensure that what you write online is relevant for your target audience and tailored to meet their needs.

Planning to Succeed? Then Plan to Succeed
So by now, you’ve figured out that people read very differently online to the way they read printed media, and it’s to be hoped you’ve also
spent some time listening to your audience to develop an understanding of what they care about.

I know you’re probably itching to get started on the writing by now, but before you plough headlong into your first blog post it’s worth considering how you are going to plan out individual content pieces and plan out all your content over a period of time.

If there is a story you are looking to write, think first about what the best way of telling that story relative to your audience might be. You might decide that a basic news story warrants a short video interview with the person at the centre of the news. Suddenly the basic inverted pyramid model often followed for news releases will also require a short video interview script.

When we write for the web, we need to remember that we have a multitude of potential publishing options for stories. The web is the distribution mechanism for a number of different media forms, whether that be the downloadable white paper, the blog post, the video chat or the 140-character micro-blog through Twitter. We should consider how the story we want to write is going to be best brought to life online, and only then start to think about actually putting fingers to keys.

If you have a full-time position writing online, you will find it helpful to plan out a schedule of your writing ahead of time. As far as possible, try to predict topics that your audience will be interested in. The more time you have spent getting to know your audience by listening to them, the easier this will be.

So if you know that in November the Spring Racing Carnival will be on in Melbourne, you can start planning your content well in advance of the actual date of the Melbourne Cup horse race. The online environment is often extremely fast moving and users will expect content to be updated regularly and promptly.

To give yourself a chance of meeting the ongoing challenges of writing for the web, it pays to be organised about preparing content well in advance wherever possible.

There’s so much more we could say about preparing to write online, but eventually you’ll have to start writing, and it’s about time we got onto discussing some of the core areas and key skills you can focus on to improve your online writing.
Key Skills for the Online Writer

In this section we’ll look at some core areas and key skills that people writing online should consider.

Make Your Writing Scannable

All available research suggests unequivocally that users online scan text rather than read it word-for-word. By understanding the way readers scan web pages, we can write to take advantage of their online snacking patterns.

In fact, studies involving eye-tracking software have shown that our reading habits, when mapped out on the page, resemble a capital ‘F’. We read in a horizontal line across the top of the page, then in another, slightly shorter horizontal line below this, and finally in a long vertical line along the left-hand side of the page. Our writing online should recognise this recurring pattern and adjust accordingly:

- Edit, edit, edit—take average print page lengths (around 800 words) and cut these at least in half. Now you have something resembling a text short enough to get read online. In short, online, if in doubt, be more concise!
- Weight the top two paragraphs of your article with the majority of the important information. This way when readers snack in the ‘F’ shape, they will at least understand what your article is about.
- Make the first two words of each subhead, paragraph and bullet point an information-carrying word—a ‘word byte’ on steroids! You need to grab the attention of readers snacking in the tail of the ‘F’.

Scannable text also requires the effective use of clear structural subheadings, and other text editing devices to ‘chunk’ the text into visibly manageable mini-sections. Highlighting keywords helps to draw readers to the main points of your writing, something they’ll thank you for. Other important considerations when writing scannable text are:

- Headlines and subheadings online have to be especially hard-working ‘word bytes’, serving a hooking function and an
informational function. Avoid clever puns or in-jokes in your headings—readers are snacking on your content and will likely want to know very clearly what the article or article sub-section is all about.

- One of the biggest success stories of the web has been bulleted lists. Time-poor, attention-starved ‘informavores’ love the ease with which bullet points detail the most important elements of a post clearly and concisely. Don’t rely slavishly on these, but do make them a part of your online writing repertoire.
- And finally, to make your web writing scannable and snack-friendly, try to stick to just one idea per paragraph. Two many ideas just become noisy and cause readers to tune out.

If you make sure that your single idea is clearly referenced in a short headline or subheading ‘word byte’, clearly discussed through a number of bullet points, with keywords bolded, and expressed concisely, you’ll be heading towards a very readable online paragraph!

**Inject Personality into Your Writing**

When Tim Berners-Lee first conceived of the World Wide Web nearly 30 years ago, he specified it should be a read/write medium, meaning that it should allow for users to create as well as consume content.

Today, we are so busy creating and consuming content online that we barely think about this amazing transformation. But we live in a Web 2.0 world. This means it’s easier for us to have a conversation with readers online, who are not just passive consumers of whatever we throw out there, but who are also active contributors to this living, breathing thing called the web.

A recent book by Rohit Bhargava, called *Personality Not Included*, discusses the importance of brands and companies today having personality. For people looking to write online, it is going to become increasingly important to be able to inject plenty of personality into your writing, and to maintain a consistency of tone around that personality.

As brands and companies spend more time communicating directly with their customers through email, enewsletters, web pages, blogs and micro-blogging platforms like Twitter, writers who can craft
personality-infused communications across a diverse range of mediums will be in high demand.

In this kind of role, it is vital for your tone of voice to remain consistent, for you to use a consistent vocabulary and mode of address. It’s also crucial that you concentrate on error-free copy and solid grammar (see Chapter 2 if you need to refresh your grammar).

Many people assume that because attention spans online are limited, grammar doesn’t matter so much as in print. Actually, the exact opposite is true. Great grammar online helps to structure powerful, hard-working sentences, which are the holy grail of web writing. Great grammar shines by improving the clarity and concision of your writing, so avoid it at your peril!

**Learning to Link Effectively and the Power of Search Engine Optimisation**

These are two very large topics—linking and search engine optimisation (SEO)—but I have decided to group them together here because there are strong connections between the two. What follows just scratches the surface of the reams of great writing on these two areas, and writers serious about establishing themselves online should definitely check out the further reading at the end of the chapter.

A massive part of online writing that differentiates it from writing for print is the ability to link quickly and easily to other content. I’m going to assume you already know what a link looks like, as you will have clicked on many of them in your time. Hypertext links are the building blocks of the World Wide Web as we know it today. As a result of this, content across a website can be accessed in a thoroughly disruptive and non-linear way.

**Every Piece of Content Matters**

You cannot guarantee that visitors to your site will arrive at your beautifully manicured and prepared homepage. Thanks to the internal and external links that lead to and from your web content, visitors to your site may end up reading old, deep-linked content you wrote years ago. Google has made it easy for searchers to find just the content they want, without having to follow the navigation of your website. When we discuss SEO, we’ll learn more about Google.
For this reason, it's incredibly important to maintain every single page of content you are responsible for in such a state that were somebody to come across it they would still be able to find out all about you or your company, and they would also be able to link through to all of your other content. To do this, it's important that you link all of your content together, either by main navigation menu links (usually at the top of a page) or by in-text hyperlinks.

Linking within Your Writing
More and more, the web is changing the way we expect to source information. If you reference an external source in your online writing, your readers will expect to be able to link to that external source to verify your use of that source. This is as relevant on personal blogs as it is when making product claims on a corporate website.

Simply put, you should be as transparent as possible when it comes to linking. This helps your readers to trust the information you are providing them and adds credibility to your online writing. Always try to make the link text—the text that serves as the hypertext link to another page—as simple and relevant as possible to the content to which it links. Avoid link text like 'Click here for more information'.

What the Hell Is SEO and Why Should I Care?
If you forgive the creative licence with an old workplace mantra, you don’t have to be a geek to write here, but it helps. Actually, Search Engine Optimisation (SEO) as a concept isn’t very technically challenging at all.

So you’ve spent some time making sure that the content you are writing online is real ‘word byte’ material, which on the web means that it’s scannable, chunked, concise, informational, actionable, full of excellent headlines, subheads and great bulleted lists. Unless people can actually find your content online though, all of this effort will have been to no avail.

In steps SEO. SEO describes the tactics writers and professional search consultants can employ to make sure that their content appears higher up in search engine results such as Google’s, and therefore is more easily found by your target audience.

There, that wasn’t too technical was it?
The truth is, SEO is a multi-billion dollar industry worldwide, and it can get very technical very quickly. To begin with though, there are some easy steps that you can take to try to make sure that your writing gets found by the major search engines (Google, Yahoo, MSN) and stands out from the online crowd:

- Optimise your content for keywords—keywords are words or strings of words (phrases) that our audience are most likely to type into a search engine when they're looking for content like ours. Once you have spent some time identifying the main keywords that people coming to your site through a Google search are likely to type in, you then need to make sure that you use those keywords liberally in your online writing.
- Aside from keyword-rich content, the success of your site in search engine results pages (SERPs) depends also on the number of inbound and outbound links to your content. If other sites link back to your content (called a backlink), the search engine treats that link as though it were a third-party endorsement of the quality of your content. The more reputable people that backlink your content, the more trusted your site becomes in Google, and the better it will perform in SERPs.
- Ideally, people will enjoy your content and then link to it, which will auto-generate a backlink and will increase your performance in SERPs. Links are so valuable, they can also be bought and sold, but to begin with consider spending your time on defining the top keywords for your content, and working hard to write quality, actionable online content to encourage others to backlink you.

There is so much more to discuss about SEO and best practice in terms of linking, so if you're keen to find out more about how you can make your carefully crafted online writing easier for others to discover and read, explore the further reading resources at the end of this chapter.

**So What Are You Waiting For?**
Right. You’ve learned why thinking before you start typing can help to make your online writing more compelling, and you’ve been
introduced to some of the key skills you will need to further develop your writing online. You even know how to make sure that all that great web-optimised writing finds its way into the hands of your target audience.

So what are you waiting for? Let’s get started writing online.

**Where Can I Begin Writing Online?**

We have already mentioned quite a few places online where you can begin testing out some of the things you have learned in this chapter about writing for the web. If you aspire to a career working as a writer online, it is well worth getting started using some of these free and easy tools. The practice you put in now will soon have you writing great online copy, and with any luck, making a living from it!

I’m assuming that you are currently not employed as an online writer or editor for a company, but even if you are, you still might like to consider the benefits of the easiest way to get into online writing, blogging.

Blogs are one of the most common forms of online writing. They started out as people’s online diaries, but now you will find an incredibly diverse range of content delivered on blogs, from company annual reports through to anonymous religious confessions.

Blogs thrive on having a strong personality, and are often about one particular area of content. They are incredibly easy to set up, hence why there are so many millions of them online already!

Successful blogs can develop a community of regular readers (much like a magazine) and some boast hundreds of thousands of daily subscribers to their content. Darren Rowse is the Melbourne-based founder of ProBlogger, a blog all about the art of blogging, which at last count has 53,987 subscribers.

In case you’re wondering whether you can actually make money from blogging, Darren’s salary from blogging is estimated to be over $100,000 a year, based on advertising revenue from his blog alone, and he’s also built himself up as a personal brand. Not bad going!

**How Do I Start Blogging?**

The two most popular free blogging services are Wordpress (http://wordpress.com) and Blogger (www.blogger.com). There are many others, and they all have features and benefits you might like to
explore for yourself. You can set up a Wordpress or Blogger site in a matter of minutes and choose from a number of free templates to suit your style.

**What to Consider?**  
Before you start typing, think about some of these points:

- Blogs usually require regular updating, so don’t expect to write something new once a month. To develop a regular readership, you should consider writing at least two to three posts a week.
- Blogs allow for readers to comment, so try to make your writing style as conversational and discursive as possible. This will help to drive comments and a sense of community around your writing.
- Link to other bloggers you love reading. The blogosphere is a pretty friendly environment, and bloggers regularly link to each other’s writing. Of course, as you now know this helps to increase your SERP performance, but it’s also good social practice and enjoyable!

Most of all, stick at it. If you’re serious about developing your online writing skills, there’s no reason why you can’t use this chapter as a launchpad for the start of your blogging career.

**Get a Head Start**  
Hopefully this chapter will have introduced you to some important concepts and ways of thinking about writing for the web in the information society. More and more of our content is being consumed through a screen, and developing the confidence and skills to write persuasive and engaging online copy is likely to be an important part of any writer’s career in the future.

As I said at the start, this chapter is your handy little starter’s guide to writing in the information society. If you’ve enjoyed what you’ve read and you think you’d like to develop your online writing skills, please dive headlong into the further reading. The collected books, websites and blogs there will provide you with more than enough food for thought to keep you snacking for many months to come.
Further Reading


—— *ProBlogger Secrets: Blogging Your Way to a Six-Figure Income*, Wiley, Melbourne, 2008.
The crucial skills in this post-industrial ‘information economy’ (Barr 2000; Castells 1997) are those of research and writing: the ability to find information, the ability to synthesise information and the ability to present that information for other people.

Ina Bertrand and Peter Hughes

In time of trouble, I had been trained since childhood, read, learn, work it up, go to the literature. Information was control.

Joan Didion

The Why and What of Research
As I have made clear in other chapters of this book, it is important to read in the genre in which you want to write. In the genre covered in this chapter, it is quite impossible to ignore what others have written on your topic if you want to write a successful research report.

Of course, your ‘research’ will also often include empirical work—frequently referred to as ‘fieldwork’. If you are a student in, say, a Media and Communications course, you might be required to
analyse a body of material gathered from media or cultural products. This is your empirical work or fieldwork, and could comprise newspaper articles written over one week on a certain topic, for example. Or you might need to analyse illustrations of celebrities in popular magazines to see whether what is offered is the representation of a certain type of body (for example, extremely slim bodies). In such a scenario, a lecturer might ask students to use one or more of various research methods to try and formulate some explanations of what it is that readers are being offered in these articles or illustrations.

**Empirical or Fieldwork Research Methods**

There are numerous research methods, each with its own specific history and usage. The methods most commonly used in social science based disciplines at undergraduate level are content, or quantitative, analysis and one or more forms of qualitative analysis. Qualitative methods include those such as discourse analysis (a close analysis of the language used, based on linguistic principles), as well as the more specialised research methods of semiotics, visual analysis, interviews, and observations (of the production of a radio show, or a newsroom, for example). While once these two types of methods—quantitative and qualitative—were thought to be poles apart, with each group of theorists possessing completely different world views, and arguing for the supremacy of their method and the inadequacy of the other, in recent decades most researchers have come to recognise the benefit of using both quantitative and qualitative methods together. This is often referred to as 'triangulation', which simply means that a more complete picture of a particular object or phenomenon can be obtained by using completely different, but often complementary, methods of viewing or measuring it.

If you were to use content analysis to examine illustrations in a popular magazine, say, depending on your particular research focus you might ask the following types of questions to generate material for your report: how many pictures are there of women? (Or elderly people, or young people, or men, or people of differing ethnicities, and so on.) If women are your focus, you might ask: What proportion seem to be represented as extremely slim? How many captions have a tone that could be categorised as admiring, or criticising, or neutral? Because you are counting up numbers in each category, this is
quantitative, although the last question—examining the tone of the captions—borders on the qualitative. In any case, you could then ‘tri-angulate’ your examination of this material by using a totally qualitative method of investigation, such as semiotics or visual analysis (for more on these methods, see the items by O’Shaughnessy and Cottle in the Further Reading list).

If you wanted to use content analysis to quantitatively examine newspaper articles, the types of questions you might ask could include the following: How many and what type of sources are used? How many articles deal with public affairs issues as opposed to ‘info-tainment’? How many articles can be traced back to press releases generated from a particular organisation? And so on. You might then bring in a qualitative method such as discourse analysis to suggest the ‘discourses’ being constructed by the specific wording in the captions, or even in articles in other parts of the magazine.

The books in the Further Reading list at the end of this chapter deal in great detail with these methods I have mentioned here and with more besides. If you read at least one or two of these works very early in your project, it will not only help you clarify exactly what you want to do in your empirical work, but it will also enable you to get a great deal more out of this chapter, in which I focus mainly on the process of conducting research, and the structure of your research essay. A particularly helpful book on research methods is Research Design by John Cresswell. Excellent explanations of semiotics as a methodology, for example, are in works by Barthes, O’Shaugnessy and Stadler, and Bignell.

**Reviewing the Literature**

By ‘the process of conducting research’ I mean the type of research which needs to be done before you can begin the empirical research (although of course not all research reports will include empirical work). This type of research is referred to by a wide range of terms. ‘Reviewing the literature’ is probably the most common term. Others sometimes refer to it as ‘developing the theoretical framework’, which of course cannot be done without reviewing the literature, an activity that seems so obvious to some people that they don’t explicitly name it. Another term is simply ‘library research’, as historically that is where most of this research material was housed. There are three
main purposes of this step of the research: to find out if the topic you are proposing to research is achievable—if no one else has done it, or if many have done it, you will need to give this some thought. Has this research been done internationally, but not in Australia? If so, you could use international studies for methodological guidance, arguing for the usefulness of this approach to your research. If many others have done this type of research, then you should argue for a new way of doing it; for example, if many researchers have analysed the relationship between young women's poor body image and women's magazines, but have not researched a particular popular Australian magazine, then you could argue that this would be of significant interest as the Australian results could be compared to international results to provide targeted, local information on the topic. In either case, a researcher needs to make sure that he or she can state with confidence that there has been 'no research' or 'little research', or whatever, something that is only possible after very thorough searching.

The second purpose of reviewing the existing literature is to make the researcher something of an 'expert' in the field. There is no point in reading a report on women's magazines, for example, if the author is not familiar with the major views about this media product, and the types of research that have been carried out at least in the past few years. And the third purpose is to enable researchers to narrow their focus. Students will often declare they want to research 'the harmful effects of women's magazines', or 'the differences between The Australian newspaper and the UK Guardian' and so on. These topics are much too broad and unfocused for even a research essay of a few thousand words, let alone for a 10,000-word report or thesis. Reviewing the literature will help to narrow the focus to something more achievable. After reading widely, a researcher on women's magazines might decide that in a 12,000-word report she can look at whether there are 'contradictory messages about body sizes' in a small number of issues of, say, Cosmopolitan. A newspaper researcher could decide to compare the content of the blogs of The Australian newspaper to those of the UK Guardian over a few days. To focus even more, it's necessary to come up with a preliminary hypothesis or research question. There are many such questions modelled in the research literature. The newspaper researcher might decide to ask:
‘How much of the content of weblogs in the two newspapers is real ‘citizen journalism’?’ Such a question would involve reviewing literature on both newspaper weblogs and citizen journalism.

Jane Stokes, in her book *How to Do Media and Cultural Studies*, listed in the Further Reading section at the end of this chapter, talks readers very carefully through the steps of narrowing down the topic, finding appropriate research methods, doing the appropriate reading, sketching out an overall argument, and finally coming up with a clearly defined research question or hypothesis. Of course, it’s difficult to mount an argument before you’ve done a certain amount of reading around a topic. Stokes suggests having a ‘hunch’ to guide your reading, and as you read and gain more information your argument (sometimes referred to as the ‘theoretical framework’) will be refined as you go. This will then help you devise a specific research question or hypothesis, which Stokes recommends is better if phrased comparatively. For example, in my current research I am examining a certain genre of article, ‘op-eds’, in two different newspapers—*The Age* (Australia) and the *Guardian* (UK). Because I have completed some of the reading, I can say that my theoretical framework is one which argues that it is better for democracy if a variety of voices are offered through mainstream media, especially over ‘deliberative’ issues, those which society needs to debate. At this stage my hypothesis is ‘Compared to *The Age*, the *Guardian* offers more space, a wider variety of voices, and a calibre of op-ed writing which conforms more closely to classical norms of deliberative rhetoric.’ However, by the time I have completed my reading, I may find I have to amend this hypothesis in some way. For example, I may discover that other researchers have conducted identical or similar surveys, in which case I will need to amend my focus and therefore my hypothesis. Or I may gain valuable insights from my reading that will encourage me to change direction slightly if I feel that it will be more fruitful to analyse the article from another angle. This is why the first research stage, of reading and reviewing published material around the topic, is so valuable.

This phase of reading and reviewing (which means reading critically) should be accompanied by note-taking, summarising and recording useful quotations. Don’t restrict yourself to the latter; the summarising is extremely important, as are notes that record your
own thinking as a result of this reading. Quotations are only useful if they express important points in succinct and hard-hitting ways. All quotations—even as few as two words—must be enclosed in quotation marks, with the author’s surname, the text’s publication year and the exact page number listed after them. Any ideas that are not your own should also be acknowledged in this way, although if you have taken care to put it totally in your own words, then you will not need to use quotation marks.

**The Annotated Bibliography**

This stage of the research also involves producing an annotated bibliography. This is simply a case of typing out the reference details of each book as a heading, and typing your notes and quotations underneath it. The notes will range from one paragraph (for, say, your summary of a short journal article that did not provide you with a lot of help), through to many pages, something you will want to write for a lengthy book that was targeted on your topic. A short annotated bibliography might look something like the example below, although I have only included one paragraph for each reference, as an example. In practice, it would be much longer. This example was set out in a Word document, a perfectly acceptable way to do it. Lately, however, many researchers and other academics have more and more been using bibliographic software packages that function as the researchers’ own tailored database for storing references, including research notes, with the option to append pages or whole articles, or images, or other parts of the reference, in portable document format (PDF). There is also the possibility to include hyperlinks and so on. There are several types of bibliographic software products available—Endnote, ProCite, RefWorks and Reference Manager. Universities and organisations generally choose one and then make that available to their staff and students, along with tutorials, either online or fact-to-face. Endnote is the one used at the University of Melbourne so that is what most of my colleagues and I use. Whichever one you choose, these software programs can take much of the boring work out of recording and then citing bibliographic details in your essays and reports. You may type in details yourself or, from within the program, you may retrieve and
copy bibliographic records from online databases, including library catalogues, into your personal Endnote ‘library’ (database). The online catalogues of many libraries, both national and international, can be accessed through the Endnote software.

After you have stored each reference in your Endnote ‘library’, the software then enables you to insert the brief reference (to acknowledge a quote, for example) as you are typing your essay or report, and will later (when you give the command) include this reference at the end of your essay in an automatically generated bibliography. You can select the bibliographic style beforehand, such as Harvard Author-Date, Chicago, MLA and so on. For my article reprinted in Appendix 13, I was required by the journal to which I was sending it, to format my in-text references and the bibliography in the Harvard Author-Date style. This journal discouraged footnotes, although as you will see, one footnote was unavoidable. In contrast, the publisher of this book, Melbourne University Publishing, prefers endnotes, and discourages use of the Harvard Author-Date format, providing instead their own style sheet for referencing, a common practice of publishing houses. You can note the difference between the MUP recommended style, and the Harvard style by comparing and contrasting the bibliography of my article in Appendix 13, with the bibliography of this book.

In any case, with bibliographic software, your bibliography will virtually be done for you, in whatever format you require. This software does require a few hours of training, however, and trying to use it without this training can result in a lot of frustration. Large libraries often have online tutorials for the software, or will run training sessions for it. See, for example, at the University of Melbourne: www.lib.unimelb.edu.au/endnote.

If you use Endnote, your annotated bibliography will take the form of one or several sheets for each entry. An example of this is provided below (see Figure 1). But first is an example of a student’s annotated bibliography, which she simply typed into Word. Note in particular the precision and the standard way in which the references are recorded, and also the mix of summary with quotations, complete with inverted commas and page numbers.
This book is about fear and its expanding place in our public life through the ‘discourse of fear’ (ix) mainly in mid-1990s, but it still applies today. Altheide sees this use of discourse as an attempt ‘at social control’ (x). This discourse comes in the form of language, icons, entertainment format, slogans, and visuals. He shows ‘how mass media and popular culture are shaping our social world’ (1). The point is that with enough repetition and expanded use of this discourse, ‘fear … becomes a way of looking at life’ (3). This is what I want to examine in my essay on the newspaper coverage of the French riots.

Cottle wishes to show that different forms of visual manipulation can change or even invert the sense of depicted scenes. This is relevant to my essay since ‘constructing’ reality can be aided by visuals to provide visual authentication to a journalist’s text. News photos play an ‘important authenticating role when placed in service of news reports’ (201). ‘Shots [are] selected according to their perceived contribution to the ‘news story’ as conceptualised by the reporter’ (195). Cottle suggests that these are ‘deliberate attempts to falsify and distort’ (193) to construct a sense of factuality. The ‘camera angle, selectivity and omissions are unavoidably a part of news visual production’ (196).

This chapter focuses more on media ‘packaging politics’ (110) with regards to events in Iraq, Vietnam, Yugoslavia and Northern Ireland among others. These authors stress the importance of public relations. It is already understood that ‘advertising, public relations and propaganda are interlinked’ (110). Firstly, General Eisenhower’s television image shows the close ‘attention given to style, symbols, surroundings, and technique’ (112). This is how his ‘information talks’ are constructed. These authors also use Margaret Thatcher as an example due to her various ‘media advisers’ (112). ‘Essentially party leaders and policies are seen as products which have to be sold to the voter’ (113). They continue: ‘attempts to control this flow also meant that what may be regarded as the bad news from the government’s point of view is censored, ignored, or downplayed’ (114). Examples of censorship are then examined (116).

This is a continuation of Volume 1, *Bad News* (1976). Then, as now, the Glasgow Media Group highlight visual and narrative techniques used in...
news production by which the dominant ideology of the status quo is reproduced, continually affirmed and thereby secured. This study uses visual, discourse, content analysis and semiotics to observe the news coverage of the London dock strike on ITN’s main bulletin 27th of March 1975. Throughout the book, language is taken as actively playing a role in constituting how we come to understand ‘reality’ and, for some, may even be credited as discursively ‘constructing reality’. ‘Headlines are … one of the most important devices for summarising and drawing attention to a story and, so far as the press is concerned, are also one of the strongest visual indicators of style’ (141). This group wants to show that routine news practices lead to the production of bad news. ‘Newsworthiness is presented as being somehow ‘natural’ and ‘obvious’, an intrinsic property which the news journalist recognises instinctively and noses out’ (112).

Goffman (1974: 21) defines framework: ‘a primary framework is one that is seen as rendering what would otherwise be a meaningless aspect of the scene into something that is meaningful’ (122). The news is not a neutral product.


Luljak explores various aspects of decision-making in the newsroom, particularly as to ethical concerns. Wishing to conceal the actual news organisation’s name to which these deceptive behaviours actually apply, he names the news organisation WSML-TV, in Madison, Wisconsin. Luljak used narratives to show the differing contexts in which these television journalists use deception. He ‘finds that the use of deception in newsgathering is casual and routine, so much so that the journalists hardly even think of it as deception’ (11). He suggests that ‘the dominance of news organisations’ interest in audience size contributes to doubts about the ethical status of journalism’ (12). Some justify deception as ‘necessary to obtain information which is a vital public service’ (12). Others mention ‘reasons of convenience’ (13). Luljak’s narratives reveal the journalist’s willingness to broadcast misleading information (example with Tim Vaughn: the injured students’ names (15) and assisting the police in broadcasting misleading statements in hopes to find murderers), misrepresent his or her motives (Vaughn and his selfish motives: flirting with female law-enforcement agency staff to access information (17)), conceal his or her role as a reporter while recording surreptitiously (Laura Cole concealed her identity to gain access to a place from which the media was banned (18)), mislead sources (Roger Holms who made his ‘loser’ character stories seem more positive (20)), and stage news events (Anne Marshall who needed photographs of other journalists sneezing to complete visual authentication of her story on medical research (22)).

Schudson, M., *The Power of News*, Harvard University Press, Cambridge, MA, 1995. This is a study that explores contemporary media practices and their relationship to the current condition of democracy in America. Schudson is at his best when he is examining widely accepted truths, or myths as he
calls them, as for instance that the press forced the resignation of Nixon (17), or that Reagan was a Great Communicator (16), or that it was television coverage of the Vietnam War that caused the American public to turn against it. News is ‘public knowledge’ (3). He believes that ‘there are serious defects in American Journalism, and many of them can be traced to the profit motive’ (4). Journalists ‘not only distribute the report of an event or announcement to a large group, they amplify it’ (19). For example, he mentions the coverage of the Vietnam War, which was ‘far from demonstrating the horrors of war’, ‘the networks were particularly loath to show American soldiers who had been killed or wounded’ (22).

The following figure is a reproduction of one page of an Endnote version of an annotated bibliography. Note that in the Research Notes section it contains exactly the same information as the first item on the bibliography that was done using Word. However, all of the information in the other fields (except for Label) was filled in automatically when I retrieved this entry from the University of Melbourne online library catalogue.

Figure 1: One reference in Endnote entry format

192 Word Bytes
If the annotated bibliography is done well, it makes the next step so much easier. The next step will be a fluent, integrated written account of your research findings in the literature. This is called the ‘literature review’ or ‘review of the literature’ (the terms are synonymous). Sometimes, when I ask students whose research I am supervising to produce this work, I refer to it as ‘Explaining what I’ve found out in the literature, but focused quite narrowly, and channelled through my own angle or argument.’ But this is getting ahead of ourselves. First we need to go through the steps of preliminary research—searching for high-quality, published material on one’s topic, a process that usually begins in a library.

Preliminary Research Considerations
Now, of course, with the internet, with digital archives and online repositories of all types, our research is not confined to physical libraries. Nevertheless, it is best to channel one’s research of the literature through a library, or through the internet portal of a library (if using databases of academic articles, or other collections of online text, for example) in order to maintain quality control in one’s research.

This control of the quality of research cannot be guaranteed if you simply connect to the internet, and go to Wikipedia, for example, or to Google, or some other search engine. The results generated this way do not usually constitute reliable research. You might now and then use Wikipedia to get started, to obtain a few references which many of the Wikipedia entries provide, and for which you can then search in libraries. Libraries, and the large databases subscribed to by libraries, have generally checked all their inclusions for their quality and reliability for use in academic research (there are problems with and debates about this ‘gatekeeping’ of course, but this chapter is not the place for them). These collections aim to include as much quality and relevant material in a given subject area as possible.

Apart from library research, your project may require that you gain information from reports from various organisations—from private-sector companies, from government organisations, from bodies such as the Australian Press Council, or from trade unions, or any other group. An organisation’s website will very likely include such information, or feature links to a webpage where reports and other material can be purchased. Such material from bona fide organisations is of
course acceptable as source material for research reports, but you will need to make clear who produced the reports, in order to make explicit any vested interest or ideological position that might be underpinning the content.

There are several ways to begin searching for a body of material from which you will select texts that will go on to form the basis of your literature review. It is best to do a little of each type, although which type you use will depend on your objective. If your aim is to find what has been written in the last few years on a specific topic, you will probably obtain better results by confining yourself to researched articles in the academic journals—both Australian and international.

On the other hand, if you are embarking on a very large research project—an extended report, say, of more than several thousand words, or even a postgraduate thesis—you would be required to cast your net more widely, as you will be expected to build your own theoretical framework—really your central argument—on the basis of what others have already discovered and argued on this topic. This is not simply to avoid ‘re-inventing the wheel’, although that is an important consideration. There are several other significant reasons why we need to be aware of what has and has not been researched. If you read high-quality material in your topic area, you can observe the style and format in which this topic is usually written about, in order to emulate it. You can see what the major researchers, theorists and thinkers have been saying. You don’t need to fall into line behind them, necessarily; but if you wish to depart from their angle, you need to be able to constructively critique their work, and explain why the particular angle of research is needed. It might be needed simply because no one else has done it before! But of course you need to do some serious research before you can even establish that this is the case. It is usually safest to avoid much departure from established ways of looking at issues until you are researching at postgraduate level. At undergraduate level students are usually still in the process of learning or perfecting their research skills, and of learning how to write essays and reports that conform to the appropriate academic style and structure.

At doctoral level, however, a new direction, angle, discovery or insight, relating to at least part of your subject matter, is mandatory.
In my own PhD thesis, I articulated and argued for perceiving a very precise type of linguistic structure in short narratives, a structure for which I coined the term ‘narratorial presence’. But I was only able to do this after much research of what the major theorists and critics in this area had already found. After giving a summary of what other researchers had found and said on this topic, I then asserted that many theorists had hinted at the existence of the structural phenomenon whose existence I was proclaiming, but had never followed it up and researched it. So giving an overview of what others have previously written on your topic is an important step in establishing the credibility of your own research.

**Beginning Research in a Large Library**
For a lengthy research project, for which your lecturer, or the person to whom you will deliver your report or essay, has asked that you look at the work of the ‘big names’ in your field, it is always best to start with a large, preferably academic library. Most library catalogues are openly accessible on the web, so this part of the work can be done almost anywhere there is an internet connection. You will see from any library homepage that there are a number of ways to search for material: by author, title, keywords, subject headings and so on. Often you will have some idea of the authors you want to look at, and perhaps even some titles, so those books will be easy to find. You might also enter some ‘keywords’, for example, ‘media AND feminist’ (terms can be joined with AND or OR). Although this is a rather haphazard way to search, it can be useful at the start to help you find the subject headings. My keyword search using ‘media AND feminist’ for example, showed me, in the catalogue entry of the books that appeared, a number of different subject headings (these included: Women—Social Conditions, Women’s Studies, Feminist Theory). It is these subject headings that will enable you to search in the most precise and efficient way.

**Using Library Subject Headings**
Because libraries use standardised subject headings (for example, the Library of Congress subject headings) to first classify and then organise their material into topics searchable through the catalogue, it is most productive if you try to find the existing Library of Congress
subject heading that is nearest to your topic (and you can do that in the way I have just described). There are subgroups within topics, and even subgroups of the subgroups! In total, there are over 280,000 Library of Congress subject headings.6

I’ll now take you through the steps for searching using subject headings, mirroring an actual search that I recently conducted for my own research. My topic on that occasion was online newspapers, and I wanted in particular to conduct a comparison of the online version of the English newspaper, the *Guardian*, with online versions of Australian newspapers, *The Age* and *The Australian*. But before I did that I needed to see what had been researched in the area of online newspapers, and even to see if a similar study had already been conducted.

Into the Subject Search in the university library catalogue, I typed the term ‘online newspapers’; I hadn’t done a keyword search first, so I was just guessing. I was redirected to the subject heading ‘electronic newspapers’, which then led me to three books. This small number is only to be expected since research into online newspapers is still in its infancy. It is likely, however, that there are books on newspapers in general which would contain chapters on online newspapers. So I next typed into the Subject Search the word ‘newspapers’. With such a broad term, it was not surprising that this yielded 34 pages of related subject headings; and these were not pages of books, but pages of sub-divisions of the subject heading ‘newspapers’ (for example: Newspapers—Australia—History—Bibliography), or other subject descriptions which include the word ‘newspaper’ (for example: Aboriginal Australians—newspapers). The more specific the subject heading, the smaller number of books there are on the subject, sometimes only one or two. This way you can find quite specific material very quickly.

When I clicked on the single word ‘newspapers’ it yielded 27 books, and I clicked on each to try and find a list of chapters (although not all catalogue entries will reveal this), or some further information about the book. If these books are more or less on the topic you are researching, it’s a good idea at this point to note down the classification or ‘call’ number. In the case of this subject of newspapers, I found in this library that the most common number is 070 (often with
various numbers after the decimal point), but there were at least two books listed with different numbers: 330.994 and 940.541294. Armed with call numbers, you can then go and find the books on the library shelves.

**Starting the Bibliography**

It’s at this stage that you should begin compiling your bibliography. This will be a list of books and other resources that, from your catalogue search, look as if they will be useful for your project. Your initial bibliography might look something like the one below.

**Preliminary Bibliography**


If any items prove not to be useful, write this next to the item, in case you come across the book later and forget that you’ve already vetted it. For the items that are useful, you will enter your notes below each heading, so that the document will go on to become your annotated bibliography, as we showed above. You will notice that, in common with that example, the full details of each text are written out here, and that they are all in a specific format. Formats for setting out bibliographies vary from one organisation to another, and you need to find out the one required by your organisation, department or publication. The one above is known as the ‘author/date’ style, for obvious reasons. Others are known as MLA, Chicago, APA and so on, all differing, even if only slightly. You don’t *have* to write down the full details before reading or looking through the book and deciding whether it is going to be useful to you or not, but the details for all books you draw on in your research need to be noted down carefully in order to be listed fully at the end of your report or essay. Trying to find these details at the last minute can be a nightmare. Some library catalogues allow you to click on a box at the side of each listed book.
In this way, you can mark all those that you want and collect them into a list that you can then email to yourself, print, or save as a file (there will be instructions and/or buttons to enable you to do this).

Locating Journal Articles
As well as consulting researched books, you are going to need to look at researched journal articles. There are a number of ways of doing this. The main thing is NOT to go to Google or Wikipedia and type in your research topic; this is unlikely to direct you to researched articles, anyway. More and more people are doing this, and the results are not usually suitable for researched reports. Even some politicians’ speech writers have been known to do it, getting their facts terribly wrong, with disastrous consequences. Whatever else Wikipedia might be, it is hardly useful material for high-quality, original research.

It can be useful, however, for gathering preliminary interesting tidbits, as long as you understand that some of them could well be incorrect; it can also be useful to get you started on a topic by giving you a few details you might not have known, providing you check those details before quoting them. Wikipedia entries often list scholarly articles at the end of an entry, which you can then try and obtain.

Using the Google Scholar Search Engine
There is one search engine that can at times be useful for finding details about researched articles, and even about researched books, and that is Google Scholar: http://scholar.google.com.au. You can search by author or title (only if you know the specific things you are looking for), but more commonly you will search by keywords. A keyword is a specialised term that you believe will be featured in the title, abstract or body of an article. Google Scholar usually works best when you have a relatively clear idea of what exactly you are looking for. For example, if I wanted to find an article that I remember reading a few years ago about French cinema critic and theorist Jean Mitry, but cannot remember the title, I could try putting in the terms:

‘Jean Mitry’

I did this, and Google Scholar brought up 857 references for me. It is a waste of time for any researcher to trawl through that many,
but then I recalled that the article was actually about French cinema, as well as being about Mitry, and so I started a new search with the terms:

'Jean Mitry’ AND French cinema

This time Google Scholar brought me 524 references. The results were narrower, but still too many to trawl through. I then thought it very likely the article had been published since the year 2000, so altered my search thus:

'Jean Mitry’ AND French cinema AND 200

I put ‘200’ as that would pick up all years from 2000 to the present—2008. This reduced the number of references to 151, a much more manageable number through which to sort.

Just out of interest I then put Jean Mitry into Wikipedia, and found the following entry:

Jean Mitry (7 November 1907 – 18 January 1988) was a French film theorist, critic and filmmaker, co-founder of France’s first film society and later of the Cinémathèque Française in 1938.

The first lecturer of film aesthetics in France, Mitry was one of the first intellectuals responsible for, in the words of Dudley Andrews, ‘taking film studies out of the era of the film club and into that of the university’. His definitive works are largely considered to be The Aesthetics and Psychology of the Cinema and Semiotics and the Analysis of Film.

Mitry was one of few major film theorists who actually worked with film production. He was editor of Alexandre Astruc’s short film Le Rideau Cramoisi (1953) and director of two films of his own, Pacific 231 (1949) set to Arthur Honegger’s music and Images pour Debussy (1952) set to the music of Claude Debussy. (Wikipedia, accessed 8 August 2008)
This text appears alongside a picture of Mitry’s book *The Aesthetics and Psychology of the Cinema*. It is very likely that by the time you read this, the entry on Mitry may have been augmented or corrected, but the bare outline of his life here is useful, if one doesn't know it already, as is the list of films and the titles of his books. This is the sort of thing for which Wikipedia can be beneficial: when you just want to have a quick look and get an overview of something. It will very likely be too vague, or incomplete, or even wrong, to use in a researched essay. But if you do use it, you should also acknowledge any material taken from Wikipedia, or any other website, in the way I have done above; that is, with the date on which it is accessed, making very clear which words you have copied. You will usually do this with inverted commas, or—if the quoted material is longer than four lines—by setting out the quote separately, as I have done, indented from the body of your essay, and in a font size 1–2 point smaller than the one in which you are typing your main text.

To underline the point about the unreliability of Wikipedia, I looked up Jean Mitry in a specialised film index, Film Index International, a much more reliable source. This gave his complete list of films and included references by and on Mitry. It also gave a different birth date to the one given in Wikipedia, and it is far more likely that the film index date is correct, since it is a reputable, quality source used by librarians. Google Scholar has different drawbacks: the main problem is that you will often be brought hundreds of thousands of references—books as well as articles—to plough through, and that is not a productive use of a researcher's time. The trick is to keep adding words to your string of keyword search terms, thus narrowing the results. Here is how I did a recent search on Google Scholar.

The first terms ‘Guardian online newspapers’ yielded 18,600 references—far too many for me to look through. I next added the word ‘content’ to my initial string of words. This reduced the references to 12,100.

Then I added the word ‘comparative’, which reduced the references to 3,800. Noticing that there are newspapers called ‘Guardian’ in other countries than the UK (something I should have thought
about at the start!), I added UK. This brought the yield down to 2,560, which is still too many. I then decided I would only look at references published since the year 2000, so added 200 (to take in 2001, 2002, etc). This finally brought the yield down to 1400, which is still a lot, but somewhat less unmanageable. Later I realised that UK was not a wholly reliable term, as many people might describe the *Guardian* newspaper as being produced in Britain, or in England, and so to be really methodical, I should have gone back and repeated the search, putting each of those terms in place of UK. The same problem would arise with English/Australian spelling versus American spelling. If you were looking up something to do with globalisation, for example, you would need to repeat your search with the American spelling, globalization, otherwise a lot of material would fall through your net. With library catalogues and databases you can often avoid this problem by using the ‘wildcard’ function. This means you could put in ‘Globali?ation’ and it should search for both spellings. Another example is ‘behavio*r’.

Once you feel you have narrowed your search down as far as you can, the next job is to start sifting through the titles, only stopping on those that look as if they are really on your topic. Google Scholar doesn’t usually take you to the entire article or book section—it is more likely to give you just the reference details and an abstract. And often, you won’t even get an abstract. Depending on your topic, searching with Google Scholar can be a time-consuming, hit-and-miss way of searching for references. However, you can usually tell after skimming through a few pages whether or not the results are going to be of much help to you. If the title seems suitable, click on it, and go to the next level of information, seeking an abstract or summary. You should be able to tell from skimming the abstract whether the reference is likely to be of any help to you. If it is, then copy the reference details and paste them into a word file to start a new section of your bibliography. After trawling through nearly fifty pages of references, which took me about an hour, I had only found two or three that looked to be of any use, and so I gave up this method. I copied the three references and pasted them into my bibliography, as shown over the page:
Preliminary Bibliography
References from Google Scholar:
Search terms: Guardian online newspapers + content + comparative + UK + 200
INTERNET COMMUNICATION AND QUALITATIVE RESEARCH:
A Handbook for Researching …
By Chris Mann, Fiona Stewart

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Yesterday’s Papers and Today’s Technology
Digital Newspaper Archives and ‘Push Button’ Content Analysis
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This article considers the methodological implications of using digital newspaper archives for analysis of media content. The discussion identifies a range of validity and reliability concerns about this increasingly prevalent mode of analysis, which have been under-appreciated to date. Although these questions do not deny a role for the use of proxy data in media analysis, they do highlight the need for caution when researchers rely on text-based, digitalised archives.

The Future of Journalism in the Advanced Democracies
By Peter J. Anderson, Geoff Ward …

Whilst this method of finding material for your research is not the most time-efficient, Google Scholar can save you much time when you know the title of a book but lack any other details about it, and cannot seem to find it in any library. I have just found the full details on two books this way; for one I knew only the title, The Fetishism of Modernities, and for the other I knew only the two authors’ surnames, Gross and Walzer. When I typed these details into Google Scholar, both books appeared immediately with their respective publications details. I had mistakenly entered Fetishism of Modernity, and lacked authors’ initials.

Now in possession of the full details, I am able to try to find the books in my library, or—if they are not there—request them on
interlibrary loan, or see if my state library holds them. State libraries can be very useful sources of books that are otherwise hard to obtain, although usually require that readers use the book only in the library. Finally, Amazon is of course useful—not only for ordering books, but also for finding suitable lists of titles in your research area. It's often possible to view the contents pages and even some early pages of the text. I sometimes look up a book on Amazon if the library catalogue entry does not give me enough information about a book, and I want to make sure it is really what I want before making a special trip to the library!

**Finding Journal Articles—Hardcopy and Electronic Formats**

Once you have your preliminary bibliographies—from the library catalogue, or from Google Scholar, you need to go and find them in libraries. You will be able to find items either on the library shelves or in the periodicals/serials section. Many libraries now have subscriptions to electronic versions of journals, as well as or instead of the paper version, but electronic issues of journals can sometimes lag behind the paper edition by a year or more. For example, I wanted an article from the latest edition of the journal *Media International Australia*, issue no. 127, May 2008. When I checked my library catalogue I found that it was in stock. When I tried to access this 127 electronically, though, via the link provided in the online library catalogue, I found that the most recent electronic issue available was no. 123, from May 2007. So I needed to go to the library and photocopy the article from the hardcopy journal. Journals (or periodicals, or serials, as they are often termed by librarians) are often housed in their own special section (or entire floor) of the library, and are usually not available for loan, although bound copies of back issues may be available. Sometimes they have classification numbers, as books do; for example, at the University of Melbourne Baillieu library, *Media International Australia* is classified at 302.230994 MEDI. In some other libraries, journals will be organised alphabetically according to their titles. Once you have established which journal titles publish material in the area in which you are researching, you can browse through contents pages—of either hardcopy or e-copy versions—to see if anything useful to your research has been published lately. Start with
the most recent issue and work backwards. This can be time-con-
suming, and is probably best saved for lengthy theses, or in cases
where you have had difficulty finding suitable journal articles by other
means.

**Database Searching for Journal Articles**

A quicker way to find journal articles, and a very important way of
obtaining material for your research is through the databases. This
requires membership of a library that subscribes to databases (a user-
name and password is usually required to access databases). Database
searching is best used in addition to using Google Scholar, which
really only produces the best results if you have a fairly clear idea of
what you are searching for. It doesn't really matter in which order you
use these two methods. You can go back and forth between them, as
needed. Academic and other large libraries in Australia subscribe to a
number of these databases offering a large range of suitable materials,
including full text versions of articles in portable document format (PDF).

In the areas of the Arts or Social Sciences, for example, we can
find international databases such as JSTOR, Expanded Academic
ASAP, Academic Search Premier, Web of Science, Current Contents
Connect, Informaworld, British Humanities Index, Family and Society
Studies Worldwide, MLA International Bibliography and many more.
There are also specific Australian databases, such as APAFT: Australian
Public Affairs—Full Text; ATSI-ROM: Aboriginal and Torres Strait
Islander Databases; Australian Criminology Database and so on.

Because searching through numerous databases one after the
other can be time-consuming, some larger libraries use commercial
software that effectively constructs an electronic ‘gateway’ which
allows you to search several databases at once, instead of searching
each database in turn. Such ‘gateways’ can to a certain extent be indi-
vidually tailored for specific libraries; if your library uses such a
product, it will be evident from the library catalogue. The University
of Melbourne library, for example, uses the product Supersearch.

Some librarians believe searching across a set of multiple data-
bases at the one time is the most efficient way to find material,
while others believe that you will obtain better results if you search
through each database individually, or at least in groups of two or
three databases. To have any sort of success with a software ‘gateway’ such as Supersearch, the user must at the very least do an online tutorial, or have a demonstration from a librarian.

The main reason that gateways are problematic is that many of the databases are set up in quite different ways from each other. For example, JSTOR, a highly respected not-for-profit, scholarly digital archive, providing access to the full text of hundreds of academic journals, sets up its basic search to go through the entire text of articles, whereas many of the other databases will search through titles and/or abstracts. Since the gateways function through the basic search of each database, if you include JSTOR in the ‘gateway’ search, it will yield often thousands of results that you do not need because your search terms have been found as random words throughout the whole texts of articles. For this reason, it is best to search through JSTOR separately, where—in the advanced search—you can choose whether to search through titles, abstracts, or full-text.

Some databases allow users to limit results to academic journal articles (or ‘peer-reviewed’) only; the International Bibliography of the Social Sciences (IBSS) is one that does this, as is the database Expanded Academic, although sometimes finding this command (or button, or check-box) in databases can be a little challenging. Often, it can be found in Advanced Search. JSTOR has only scholarly articles but because it includes the full text of entire academic journals, this will include letters, reviews and so on, which will need sifting through and evaluating. With the Australian database APAFT it is not possible to select academic articles, and it includes a wide range of periodicals and newspapers, as well as scholarly journals, conference papers and books. Most Australian articles would be listed in the international databases, but APAFT would be useful for more general information published in reputable sources.

To show the benefits of searching through JSTOR separately, I recently conducted a Supersearch, excluding JSTOR, but using the following databases: Academic Search Premier, Expanded Academic, Web of Science, Current Contents and APAFT. I put in the terms ‘Guardian newspaper’ and ‘online’. A combined total of 82 hits came up. On sifting through them, I discovered that only a handful were academic journal articles, and some were over ten years old, so not much use to me in researching online newspapers. Many of the
82 were about newspapers called the *Guardian*, but which were not the English *Guardian* that I was looking for. I then searched through JSTOR on its own, using the same search terms. On this search, 217 references came up. Of course, I needed to go through and evaluate them. Once I did this, I could see that in terms of useful articles as a percentage of hits, my overall findings represented greater value for my time.

**Structuring Your Literature Review**

Once you have thoroughly researched a wide range of relevant material—in both book and journal form—have taken notes, and have inserted these into your annotated bibliography in either Word or Endnote, you need to present all your findings as a coherent literature review. In the process of doing your reading and note-taking, you will have narrowed down your topic. If your research was given to you in the form of a narrow, assigned topic, you will have narrowed down what you think about the topic, and have found a lot to say about it yourself. You will have read the major theorists in the general area, and will be able to articulate your theoretical framework while taking your reader through your own guided tour of the research that has already been done on your topic.

It can be difficult to know when to stop researching the literature and to start writing. How much literature you research will depend on the level of scholarship your report requires. If it is an undergraduate essay or report, then a small handful of the major researchers in the area should suffice. This handful should become larger as you progress through the undergraduate years, and on to postgraduate level. If you have to produce a report for an organisation, the appropriate level would be at least a little higher than an undergraduate report, depending on the brief you were given. At doctoral level, you are required to have researched all of the major theorists in your area, who are either writing in or have been translated into English. *How to Write a Better Thesis or Report* by David Evans is an excellent guide for writing at postgraduate level.

I find it preferable to write this literature review first of all, even before the introduction. When you have finished your report you will have thought of a suitable way to introduce it, and can then write the introduction. This is usually only a few hundred words, and is often
written last, so that it can flag all the important things in the report, most of which the researcher doesn’t know until the report is finished. There are many excellent books which take you in great detail through the process of reading for, structuring and then writing a literature review, for example *Doing a Literature Review: Releasing the Social Science Research Imagination* by Chris Hart. I would recommend that readers consult that book before proceeding. For a shorter but excellent account of how to structure your literature review, see the section ‘Reviewing the literature’ (p. 159) in Jane Stokes’ *How to Do Media and Cultural Studies*. Incidentally, Stokes recommends approaching the introduction a little differently from how I do it:

... I recommend that you write the introduction very quickly at first—spend no more than ten to fifteen minutes on it just to get down on paper where you intend to go with the project. Later, when you have finished the entire project and written the conclusion, go back to the introduction and rewrite it completely, bearing in mind where you have actually gone with the project.7

In Appendix 13 is a version of a recently published academic article of mine, entitled ‘An Integral Part of Democratic Debate? Talk Radio and the Public Sphere’ (published, in an earlier version, in the journal *Media International Australia*, February 2007). You will note that the second section ‘Researching talkback radio’ comprises my literature review. In that section I commenced by talking about the research in this field, and by trying to settle on logical definitions of terms. I then outlined what the other researchers into this particular topic have said, leading towards a general outline of my ‘theoretical overview’, or my particular angle, at least partly based on what other researchers have been saying. This angle then provides a basis for a hypothesis or research questions, or even both. These are usually expressed towards the end of the literature review or in the methodology section.

My research questions are woven throughout my methodology section in my article, before being re-stated under their own heading at the end of that section. It might be useful for you—before reading the specific questions—to go through the methodology section in my
article and to underline what appear to be the questions I am going to try and answer after doing the fieldwork part of my research. Then, to test if you were correct, read the questions I have written out under the Research Questions heading at the end of the methodology section. In any case, my methodology section shows clearly how one’s research questions should arise from both the literature review/theoretical framework, and also the methodology, and demonstrates that there needs to be a good ‘fit’ between these three elements.

**Methodology Section**

I introduced the empirical or fieldwork part of the research process in the early part of this chapter. In consultation with the person to whom you are reporting your research, and after reading about different methods, you will have decided on the best type or types to use for your research question. It is in this section that you state your chosen methods, including citing the researchers you have read, either those who have explicated the methods, and/or those who have used these methods in their own research; a combination of both is best. You will also need to construct and make clear the ‘fit’ between the themes, concepts and theoretical overview you have articulated in your literature review, your hypothesis or research question and your methodology. The methodology section in my article on talk radio demonstrates this quite clearly. This is a longer than usual methodology section precisely because research in this area has been very sparse in Australia, and much of my literature review was off to the side, and was also American. I had to argue carefully to establish the ‘fit’ between the review, my research questions, and my chosen methodology. I included here just how I ‘operationalised’ my method. That is, how I physically did it: ‘… I wanted to test my assumption by observing the process operating on the callers … I assembled a “constructed week” of his program … by recording, over a five week period … editions from five different weekday programs … I sat in Faine’s producers’ studio … and observed through the large plate-glass panel …’ And finally, ‘I followed my morning of observation by interviewing Jon Faine at the conclusion of his program.’ I wrote the first part of the methodology before conducting the research, but later I wrote up just how I went about the fieldwork after I had done it. Sometimes, in conducting your fieldwork, you may find you need to make changes to
your methodology. For example, certain plans you had might go awry; a proposed interview subject may not be available, or you try a certain method and find it does not yield the information you need to answer part of your research question. If so, you should go back and revise the appropriate sections. If you go on to present your article to be published, it may well be the ‘operationalising’ section that gets cut down. Initially, however, it is very important.

Analysis and Discussion Section
The next section, which is often broken into two or more chapters, depending on the size of your project and the length of your report, is the Analysis and Discussion section. Obviously, this section is written after you have completed your methodology section and conducted the empirical work or fieldwork, as this is where you discuss your findings. This discussion needs to follow logically from the one you began in your literature review (your ‘theoretical framework’ or central argument that ran through that earlier section). This is greatly enhanced if you can ‘interweave’ throughout this discussion the concepts, ideas and even arguments from other theorists and researchers that you first brought up in your literature review. You should also include quotes from those people. Sometimes it can be difficult to know when to use direct quotations and when to paraphrase the idea in your own words. You should use a quotation for any of these reasons: to introduce a point you are about to make; to summarise a point that you have just made; or to express an idea, in your own argument, in a particularly compelling way, which you could not improve upon if you were to put it into your own words.

Students often ask me how many of their own ideas should appear in this section, and how much should be that of others. The ideas and arguments of others are only a ‘thread’, not the main argument, but are nevertheless important to back up your argument. In my article on talkback radio the ‘thread’ from others is only just visible, mainly because of the journal’s word length requirement. In other articles the ‘thread’ will be more obvious. A good example that I usually give to students is in Chapter 9, ‘Model Essay: Semiotic Analysis of an Advertisement’, in O’Shaughnessy and Stadler’s book Media and Society (in this chapter’s Further Reading list). I ask students to take a highlighter pen and to go through that essay,
highlighting the sentences that come from others, either in direct quotes or paraphrase. Once this is done the essay usually ends up in a ‘striped’ pattern, with the highlighted ‘stripes’ becoming further apart in the second half of the essay, where it is appropriate that the writer starts using more of his or her own words. While this essay is a good example of only a first or second year tertiary essay, the structure of its ‘threading’ is applicable to other levels of research writing.

Finally, I recommend the section ‘The Project Contents’, pp. 158–70, in Jane Stokes’ book (also in the list) for an excellent overview and very practical advice for all the sections of a research report or essay; it includes sample tables of contents, information on the conclusion, referencing styles, appendices and bibliographies, as well as many of the essay sections I have just covered here. One of the benefits of having done my literature review before writing this chapter is that I can refer the reader to other material, and do not need ‘to re-invent the wheel’!

**Further Reading**


**Notes**

1 Bertrand and Hughes, p. 2.
2 Didion, 2005, p. 44.
3 O’Shaughnessy and Stadler, pp. 149–55.
4 Stokes, p. 55.
6 See http://catalog.loc.gov.
7 Stokes, p. 159.
Good writing, as we’ve been saying all through this book, has the power to get its target audience to want to read it. By now you should have started to develop your skills in creating your own ‘word byte’ writing: not only capturing your target audience’s attention, but also having the desired effect on this audience. You may be a media or writing student who is starting to produce your own pieces for publication; or a business person who needs to write letters, reports or newsletters; or someone who just wants to write and to reach out to an audience of some type. If you are a business person, your prose might be read by your clients or colleagues (from a hundred to several thousand people, say). If you are hoping to gain employment in the media industry itself—in online or hardcopy newspapers or magazines, in television, radio, public relations, advertising, corporate writing, or in creating website content—your prose will be read by many thousands, or even hundreds of thousands, or more.

If you are looking for employment that involves writing, or if you simply want to road-test your improved writing skills, it is important that as early as possible you start thinking of yourself either as a writer, or as some sort of professional communicator, and start aiming for publication. A folio of even two or three published pieces
will look very good when you start applying for positions. Those of you already in employment may, for a variety of reasons, want to start writing material that is aimed for publication.

This book will by now have given you many ideas of where to begin. A travel article maybe? Or a personal narrative article that might even double up as a short story? An op-ed? Maybe a book-length series of your travel articles? Or perhaps a novel? In aiming to market this work, you will need either to approach editors of newspapers or magazines (for the short pieces), or else to make contact with editors at publishing houses (for book-length works).

**Marketing Your Work to Newspapers or Magazines**

The skills for the various genres of newspaper or magazine writing which you have discovered in *Word Bytes* may be the most suitable ones on which beginning writers can cut their rhetorical teeth. They are also easiest genres for freelance writers to sell to publications. You may now like to try and emulate some of the other genres you will find in newspapers and magazines, or on websites. Make sure that you continue to utilise all the skills you developed through your study of this book.

Before submitting your work, study your target magazine, newspaper, or website carefully. Note the types of pieces published in each section, note the topics within the sections, the treatment of topics (for example, is the treatment simplified, or in depth?). Also note the level of language, at word, sentence, paragraph and argument levels. Students of mine have examined major media products in this way over the past few years, and have managed to have their work published in op-ed pages, in travel sections, and in an education section (this was an article for school leaves on choosing courses) of major newspapers, and mass media websites.

Don’t limit yourself to the large-circulation metropolitan daily newspapers. In discussing writing genres and styles I have often focused on the metropolitan dailies because mainstream newspaper writing is a style that has been honed by fierce competition for over 200 years, so it functions as a good model. Moreover, these mainstream publications undoubtedly have the largest audiences—no other print media can compete with a figure of half a million, or even
two hundred thousand, or even more if print and online readership figures are aggregated. So it’s always good to aim for mainstream publications.

But there are many other publications in existence, many of which will pay you for the publication of your work, and these clippings will look nearly as good in your folio, as would those of your work from *The Age* or *The Sydney Morning Herald* or the *Herald Sun*. Just make sure you study the writing style and all other requirements carefully (especially word length), and tailor-make each piece for each type of publication. To find out about different publications, a market guide is indispensable.

**A Market Guide**

There are a few market guides to publishing in Australia, but the best is definitely *The Australian Writer’s Marketplace*, updated each year, and produced by the Queensland Writers Centre. The majority of space in *The Australian Writer’s Marketplace* is devoted to listings of magazines, newspapers and journals. Alongside each title listing is the address, phone number, editor’s name (usually just main editor), circulation numbers, information on freelance submission, including rates of pay and—very usefully—the percentage of the publication that features freelance work.

The *Australian Writer’s Marketplace* also contains the following sections: a section listing most Australian publishers; a section listing script markets; a section listing literary agents, manuscript appraisal services, literary organisations, courses, awards, competitions and events; a literary calendar; a subject index; articles about various aspects of writing, such as travel writing, copyright and publication rights, and novel writing; and an essay competition each year, with the winner published in the guide the following year.

The *Marketplace* also lists all the newspapers in each state; most literary magazines, both the scholarly and mainstream; all the general magazines that you can buy in newsagents and supermarkets; specialist magazines aimed at different professional, trade and targeted interest groups, such as *Occupational Health News, Ozbike Magazine, Overseas Trading, Paintballer Magazine, The Miner, Australian Property Investor, Australian Journal of Physiotherapy, Computer*
Choice, Cinema Papers, Canine Journal, Feline Focus, National Cat. Even some student magazines are listed!

Now, whilst this listing is exclusively Australian, most other countries would, I imagine, have similar indexes that you could use to enable you to look up newspapers and magazines in that country. Also, university libraries usually have at least the current week's editions (if not more) of most of the world's major English-language newspapers and magazines. And the basic process of marketing freelance work to such media would be similar in countries outside Australia, in terms of researching the type of work published, tailormaking your writing and so on. If you are fluent in a language other than English, try researching publications in that language. It's worth remembering that the main newspapers in many countries have English-language editions.

Format for Manuscripts
The following is still the only way to format any hardcopy manuscript:

- Use white A4 paper, a reader-friendly font such as Century, Palatino or Times, in a font size of 12 points.
- Double space your work; editors like changing things and writing all over manuscripts, and you've got to give them room!
- Create margins of 3–4 cm. all around (more at the top).
- Put the title and by-line at top of first page; page numbers at top right, also a front cover sheet, bearing the title of the piece, word count, your name, address and other contact details. All pages should be stapled together at top left.
- Don't format your manuscript using manually inserted tabs to create paragraph indentations, columns and so on. Use the paragraph formatting menu, the table menu and so on. The designer is likely to reformat your text in a different point size and line length, and if you have inserted any tabs, they will all need to be removed manually.

Publishing companies, websites, journals, magazines and newspapers will often specify exactly how they want work sent in. For
example, a journal to which I sent work recently asked for three hardcopies of the manuscript, and one electronic file. Try to find out in advance what each publisher wants. Websites, mass market magazines, and newspapers are probably not going to want hardcopy.

For lengthy and/or hardcopy submissions, it’s a good idea to send a stamped, self-addressed return envelope large enough to hold your submission. This way, you may get it back if it’s rejected, often with a note, and sometimes this note will contain useful information; for example: ‘I liked this but I ran two pieces on this topic last month.’ Alternatively, you could send a business-sized, stamped, self-addressed envelope, for a reply, as you should be able to assume that editors will destroy all work that they do not want to use.

I always used to say to students, ‘Never send out your only copy of a piece of work.’ Now, with the ubiquity of computing, I doubt that such a thing as an ‘only copy’ exists, unless someone accidentally deletes a file. So my advice these days is: make sure all your files are backed up regularly, preferably at the end of each work session. In any case, it is safest to assume that anything you send out may get lost.

**Sending Material Electronically**

If an organisation does not specify the format in which they want material sent to them, by default I send them an electronic copy. In the case of short articles (2000 and under), I write a brief line to the editor, and then paste my article immediately below this line, hoping that the title and lead will function as a ‘word byte’ and encourage the editor to read the whole article. Because many email programs automatically open the top part of the email, the editor may start reading your piece and be ‘hooked’ before you know it! This underlines the importance of the title and lead to be crafted extremely well. (If you send an attachment, that’s a few more clicks they need to do to open it up, and they may not end up not reading it.) I have often been grabbed by a first sentence in these email beginnings (that I didn’t even open myself!) and without even thinking have scrolled down and read the rest because the opening was so good. Remember this when trying to ensnare editors into reading your work!

Don’t use a cover sheet if sending the manuscript electronically. Just put a quick line of summary at the start of the email, such as:
‘I am sending my 700-word article on X for your consideration.’ Then paste the article straight after this, in the body of the email, unless the editor has asked you to send the article as an attachment. If you do send it as an attachment, it’s best to save the file first as a Rich Text Format. That way, any incompatibilities between Mac and PC computers, or between Windows and Vista platforms, or even different versions of Word software will be avoided, or at least minimised.

Contacting Editors
Once you’ve sent a piece to an editor, it can be a good idea to telephone about 12–48 hours later. Striking just the right note on the phone is very important. If you’re a student or a beginning writer, don’t advertise this fact, and don’t sound diffident and timid, nor brash and arrogant—try to be somewhere in the middle. If you don’t know the editor’s name before you phone (and try to get it from the publication itself), then get it from the receptionist who answers the phone. It’s particularly important that you get this name correct (and its spelling), before sending any work in. These names are usually in very tiny print somewhere in the newspaper or website, usually in each specific section.

In her essay in the 1999 Writers’ Marketplace, Susan Kurosawa (Travel Editor of The Australian) gives what she calls a ‘six-pack of rules’ for freelance submissions. The second of these rules is ‘Know your travel editor’ in which she says the following:

I still receive submissions addressed to my predecessor, even though I have been in my present position for more than six years. Freelancers who can’t be bothered to correctly identify the name of the person who they hope will publish their work can’t really expect the courtesy of a tasting. It’s equally poor form to address a submission with ‘Dear Sir or Madam’, another clear indication that you have not consulted the section. My counterparts in Australian mainstream newspapers share my method of dealing with such poorly targeted work—straight into the bin or, if there is one, the return envelope.
Your ‘Qualifications’

In advising beginning writers who are starting to submit their work to publications, Melbourne freelance writer Leslie Cannold says, ‘You need to “sell” yourself as having some qualification for writing the article that you’re planning to submit.’ But, she adds, ‘this “qualification” doesn’t necessarily need to be a formal one.’ If we look at the articles in the Appendix, we can see that those writers’ qualifications were very specific to their pieces: Brendan Lawley was qualified to write about the effects of politicians campaigning on YouTube and myspace, because he was part of the demographic at which they were aiming; Henrietta Cook was qualified to write about house-swapping because she had just done it.

Depending on what type of article you’re trying to sell, if you telephone an editor, you might say something like: ‘I’m a freelance writer with expertise in choosing tertiary courses, and have written/have just sent you an article on this subject.’ Or ‘I’m a freelance writer and have recently researched Resort X or Island Y, and have written an article on the place.’ If you have lived in another country—especially one that is currently topical—for example, Iraq, or China, East Timor, or Afghanistan, or the US (especially relevant during an election year)—then that would be your qualification for writing about it.

Sometimes your ‘qualification’ can be quite a small one, but you can still use it. Here’s an example: late in 2007 my younger son, aged 22, was attacked and injured, although not seriously, by a large gang of adolescent boys in the city centre one night. He then had to deal with the police, with doctors in the emergency section of the hospital; and of course he had had to deal with the ethical question of whether to physically defend himself. After a small amount of research into recent police announcements that they were going to step up their presence in the city at night, I wrote an op-ed about it, and it was published as in the Melbourne Herald Sun. I had previously known hardly anything about street violence, but for that article my personal experience in supporting my son through this event was most appropriate.

You don't necessarily have to stress your ‘qualification’—whatever it is—in your initial phone call; but just be prepared about what you're going to say, when the editor asks you. Also, if the editor checks
the facts in your article—and it would have been very easy to check mine, and to find out if what I was saying was incorrect—and he or she finds out that you don't know what you're talking about, then that's very damaging for your name as a writer. And editors have memories like elephants when it comes to unprofessional contributors.

**Dealing with Rejection**

Ivor Indyk, the editor of acclaimed Australian literary magazine *Heat*, has this to say:

> It is worth bearing in mind that a rejection slip is a message rich in information, though it may not be the kind of information the writer wants to receive. The judgment behind it is based on hard-won expertise, and many years of reading. Yet it costs the reader nothing.

So try to view rejections as a learning tool. And if a rejection comes without much information, ask the editor for some feedback; or even ask yourself. Quite often, deep down, we know what is wrong with our own work, but lack the courage to admit it to ourselves. Some rejection slips are actually very positive messages. 'Do send in more of your work some time', for example. If any editor says this to you, if he or she sees more of your work at the same standard, they're very likely to print it.

**Getting Paid**

These days, if you want to receive payment for your writing in Australia, without having tax deducted at an extortionate rate, you will need to send an invoice, listing your Australian Business Number. Most editors or publishers will remind you to do this, but not always. If you already have a company, you will know all about this, and also about GST. If you don’t, then you can get yourself an ABN number on the web, by going to the Australian Business Register (ABR) public website at [www.abr.gov.au/ABR_BC](http://www.abr.gov.au/ABR_BC) and selecting ‘Apply for ABN’ from the menu. It's best **not** to elect to get involved in GST unless you are anticipating earning $50,000 or more from your freelance writing activities.
How much should you charge for your work? I always tell beginning writers to hold off on discussing money with editors until their piece has been accepted and published. Some editors will expect students or beginning writers to give their work for free. This isn’t at all fair, but I know that if I were starting out and wanting to build my folio, and the choice was between getting a piece published in a mainstream publication and not getting paid, or withdrawing that piece from the editor, and risking not having it accepted elsewhere, then I would let them have it for free.

But most editors are fair and will expect to pay you for your work. Once the piece is published, you could ring them and ask what they usually pay for a piece of that length and type, or you could research it yourself by accessing writers’ organisations, and then send an invoice. I include a template version of the type of invoice I use in Appendix 14.

**Marketing Your Book-length Work**

Marketing your book-length work is quite different to marketing short pieces to newspapers and magazines. There are several very good books currently on the market that deal with publishing book-length works, so I will refer you to those, rather than re-inventing the wheel (see Further Reading list at end of this chapter). Undoubtedly the most useful is Rhonda Whitton and Sheila Hollingworth’s *A Decent Proposal: How to Sell Your Book to an Australian Publisher*. I follow ‘to a T’ the practical advice in *A Decent Proposal* whenever I send out a book proposal. You’re looking at the result!

*A Decent Proposal* takes its readers through the entire process of producing a book, both fiction and non-fiction, from the initial idea, to research, planning, writing, manuscript appraisal, preparing the book proposal, targeting the right publishers, and contract issues. This book also stresses the very important point that you must become familiar with what types of books are being published at the moment. Writers who are not also avid readers, at least in the genres in which they hope to publish, will have very little chance of publishing their own work. Self-publishing is always an option, of course, and is covered in Samantha Schwartz’s *Australian Guide to Getting Published*, also listed in Further Reading.
Essential Tools
Among your essential tools (of which the Marketplace Guide, mentioned earlier in this chapter, is one) will be a good dictionary (I used a two-volume hardcopy Oxford English Dictionary, and also the online Dictionary.com at http://dictionary.reference.com. I also have a hardcopy Roget’s Thesaurus, and as well use Thesaurus.com at http://dictionary.reference.com). The internet has mostly taken away the need for more hardcopy requirements than that, but this topic is covered more fully in Chapter 5.

Other Reference Tools
In common with most people now, I use many internet sources for reference and research. I deal with research skills more fully in Chapter 14, where I also make clear my opinion about the dubious reliability of a lot of the material in Wikipedia. Despite doing a lot of my research via digital means, there are nevertheless a few reference books that I like to have nearby when I am working, to back up internet sources, or because I have not been able to find what I want on the internet. It’s important to make sure any hardcopy resources are within reaching distance from where you sit at your computer. If you have to get up from your keyboard, chances are you will put it off, and then the best word will not be found, or a fact will go unchecked (or too often, taken from some unreliable source, thus marring your work).

I find a one-volume (for ease of handling) encyclopaedia of good repute to be a useful tool. While it’s true that information on most things can be found on the internet, this can be a time-consuming process as you trawl through webpage after webpage. With an encyclopaedia, I can often find a neat few paragraphs giving me all the essential information, and avoid the distractions of the million-and-one things that would be yielded by an internet search. Reputable encyclopaedias, such as Encarta, are also available in CD-ROM format. The hardcopy volume I use is The Hutchinson Softback Encyclopaedia. Another essential volume is the SBS World Guide (2002) or a similar book. This is an alphabetical listing of facts on all countries. Other useful but not essential books include a dictionary of quotations, and perhaps a Biblical Concordance.
Writers’ Organisations and Writing Competitions
Most Australian states have a Writers’ Centre, which is listed in the phone book. These centres are goldmines of information, especially for beginning writers. They usually have a website, library, support and referral services, short courses in many aspects of writing, and regular newsletters. These newsletters typically list ‘opportunities’ for writers, including details of forthcoming competitions (usually for short stories, poetry or essays), advertisements for manuscript appraisal, for contributions to various books and so on.

There are numerous competitions in each state, run by writers’ groups, newspapers, online media, both local and mainstream, various local governments, libraries, as well as other organisations. There are also national competitions, run by universities, or by magazines or other publications. These competitions are almost always advertised in the newsletters of various writers’ centres.

In all cases, try to read as many as possible of each competition’s previous winners and place-getters. Also, find out who the judges are (this is usually given in the publicity material for the competition), and take a look at some of their work. For example, Sophie Cunningham is probably going to choose a different type of story to that which Tim Winton would.

Conclusion
I would like to hope that there is really no conclusion to the quest for creating ‘word bytes’ and getting them out to the light of print, or the backlight of pixels, or even both at once! I can best explain this by relating an anecdote I heard a few years ago. I can’t vouch for its truth, but it goes like this.

In his later years, a certain famous artist would go around the various galleries in Europe that had bought some of his works. He would stop before each painting, scrutinising it for a long time. Sometimes, when his escorts were looking away, he would pull from his pockets a paint brush and a tube of paint, and try to alter something in the painting. The story goes that he had to be physically restrained, and even reminded that he no longer owned that particular painting. But he wanted to perfect it, he said. He could see now how he could have improved that particular part of the painting, and he could not bear to leave it the way it was.
I call this attitude the ‘famous painter syndrome’, for his actions embodied the eternal quest to make our work more potent, more perfect, to heighten the specific effect that we want to have on our audiences.

But of course, one must also be pragmatic. We cannot work on one manuscript, endlessly. That is what deadlines are for. We must aim to make our work as good as we can make it, within the allotted time. Even after something is published, just like our famous painter, we will still find things in it that we feel we could have done better. But once it is in print or pixels, that is how it stays, at least for the duration of the print run (if a hardcopy), or until a correction is uploaded. What is most important is that we learn from our errors.

Finally, I must say that if you want to improve your writing you must write regularly, if not every day (if you are not doing this yet, you might like to go back and re-read Chapter 1 ‘Beginning with the Blank Screen’). You should also read good books continually because writers are always readers. Try to have at least one book ‘on the go’ all the time. Read the book review pages in the newspapers. Check out the New Releases shelves in a good bookshop.

To finish Word Bytes, I would like to leave you with a quotation by Walter Mosley, a renowned writer. He says:

If you want to be a writer, you have to write every day. The consistency, the monotony, the certainly, all vagaries and passions are covered by this daily reoccurrence.

The act of writing is a kind of guerrilla warfare; there is no vacation, no leave, no relief. In actuality there is very little chance of victory. You are … likely to be defeated by your fondest dreams.

But then the next day comes, and the words are waiting. You pick up where you left off, in the cool and shifting mists of morning.²

I find especially powerful the clause ‘the words are waiting’. Because indeed they are. They are waiting for us to craft them into ‘word bytes’.
Further Reading

Notes
1  Lee, 2007.
2  Mosley.
Wannabe memoir writers, take note. Your tell-all had better contain juicy gossip and tales of an impoverished childhood or Daniel Burt will be leaving it on the shelf.

If I were Peter Costello, I’d be smirking, too. He’s got pretty much no responsibility, his mates have yapped endlessly in public about how terrific he is and he was paid by taxpayers to sit on the backbench while he tapped out, then promoted, his memoirs. Can you imagine a casual employee of Hungry Jack’s getting away with that? ‘Hey! I know I work here but get off my back about grilling patties! I’m in the middle of the anecdote where Stacey drops her phone in the deep-fryer. What’s that? You want to know if I’m quitting? Why don’t you just shut your hole, keep paying my wages and hang tight until this puppy hits the shelves.’

Compressing your life into a book is a pompous undertaking. Few of us have the conviction required to assume that people will want to curl up in bed and read about our life. And as for being read about when I’m dead? Not likely. People don’t even talk about me when I leave the room.
Then again, few of us get to be treasurer of the Commonwealth of Australia, presiding over a decade of economic blah blah blah. And this is the point: readers want dirty, juicy gossip, not a dispassionate catalogue of accomplishments—unless that catalogue includes the number of beer cans cracked open on a long-distance flight. Or, for that matter, the number of flight assistants cracked onto on a long-distance flight.

The longer it takes to write a memoir, the more pressure there is for it to be sensational. That’s why every autobiography needs these three elements:

A tough early childhood: Mummy gave you presents not hugs? Spent a winter’s night in the family car? Throw in anything that gives the impression you overcame personal hardship and weren’t just born into privilege. If you were born into privilege, or inherited fame, talk about how you fought off luxury to forge your own future. It will all be a load of crap but we’ll forgive you if you name-drop and toss in stories about famous people stopping by to visit Dad.

A health scare: Excellent if you were bedridden as a child. Illness can be difficult to invent, so if disease is thin on the ground, talk about the near misses. Sentences should end with ‘… the doctor said five millimetres either side, and I’d be dead.’ Remember, having a mobile phone accidentally vibrate against your genitals does not count unless cancer is diagnosed. Which brings me to the next element …

Sex: Omission can stymie sales and hijack the news cycle, so include everyone and everything—the time, place and barometric pressure. If you think nobody saw you, cast your mind back. Remember that blob and rustle from behind the bush? It was Laurie Oakes with his notepad.

Don’t forget that anyone you have ever met will flick through the index, looking for their name. But frequency isn’t everything and the index is a chance to enact subtle revenge. In Costello’s index, look for Howard, John (see, Slimeball Who Trashed My Life). Also, be sure to include a benighted high-school teacher who, in an untraceable exchange, asserted you would ‘never amount to anything’. Your every success has been propelled by a desire to prove him wrong. Ideally, this teacher will be dead enough that you can destroy his reputation without fear of litigation.
Some people have favourite authors. Not me.

I have favourite ghost writers. Look at the person, whoever he or she is, who wrote Geri Halliwell’s memoirs. Any Cambridge graduate with a masters in literature can write like a Cambridge graduate with a masters in literature, but it takes true genius for that same person to reproduce the voice of a Spice Girl.

As with the tomes of many celebrities whose lives are bursting with too many insights, Ginger’s memoir spilled into a second volume. There are books that chronicle the global history of the 20th century in fewer pages. No word yet on if Costello’s book will be the first in a series but, as Socrates meant to say, the unexamined life is not worth $54.99 in hardback.

I personally prefer to read unauthorised biographies because they make me feel as if I’m doing something dangerous. They cover events and perspectives that flamboyant tycoons, colourful racing identities and Australian Test cricketers omit from their own stories. Truth comes from the third person; like how only your friends can tell you what you did when you were drunk last night.

After his much talked about silence, the memoirs of the former treasurer were released earlier this month. Complete with fully audited page numbers. Action through his career brought him fame; inaction brought him, if not infamy, then something around infamy’s vicinity. I just hope his teachers are dead. And that I somehow score a mention in the second edition—it will make a great yarn for my memoirs.

First published in *Sunday Life (The Sunday Age magazine)*, 28 September 2008.
Appendix 2: Personal Narrative Article

‘Strangers in the House’

_Henrietta Cook_

For some, the thought of complete strangers in their house is enough to send shivers down the spine. Let alone strangers who sleep, eat, shower and who-knows-what else in their house.

I’m talking about the mysterious practice of house-swapping—something I recently experienced first hand.

It was a friend of a friend who planted the idea of a house swap. It was also a friend of a friend who recommended the house-swap family. Perhaps that was our first mistake—putting our trust in the hands of strangers.

A series of phone calls and emails between Melbourne and Paris secured the swap and it wasn’t long before my mother went into a cleaning frenzy. In the weeks that followed, our house was transformed from what was once a tidy yet lived-in family dwelling into a sparkling white, pristine guesthouse. Taps were polished, doonas aired, paths weeded, windows cleaned and floorboard cracks vacuumed.

We arrived in Paris on a cold winter’s morning and took a taxi to our house-swap destination. The city was dark but already there were signs of life. Shop doors swung open, couples walked their dogs and men dressed in green rhythmically swept the streets. I imagined
stepping out of the taxi and into the life of a vibrant Parisian neighbourhoo
d, shrugging off the tourist persona and instantly becoming a local. The taxi gradually came to a stop as we approached the driveway of a grim 1970s block of high-rise flats in the suburb of Telegraph.

I clambered up the stairs, opened the front door and was immediately hit by the stench of dog, mouldy bread and the lingering smell of a recent fire. Visions of a quaint Parisian apartment adorned in beautiful objects and overlooking bustling streets were quickly extinguished. I scoured the rooms for something attractively foreign and picturesque. There were no creaking wooden staircases, no rustic iron balconies, no potted geraniums aligned on the window sill and no freshly baked pastries awaiting us. The turn of a door handle had granted me immediate access into the intimacy of a stranger’s life, but it was not a life I had any desire to share.

A cursory glance revealed that the beds were unchanged; the sheets a soiled mess of dirt and dog-hair. Piles of rubbish littered the kitchen floor—decomposed vegetable scraps and two-week-old fast food containers. I was desperate for a shower after the long flight from Melbourne and went looking for a towel but the linen cupboard was bare. The only towels available were a soiled, sodden heap on the bathroom floor. A recent kitchen fire had badly charred the walls of the house and left a path of destruction in its wake. The bathroom was a mycologist’s dream, carpeted in a thick layer of green mould. And to make matters worse, the phone had been cut off, the toilet was clogged and the oven unusable. After the long and tiring journey from Melbourne to Paris, this was not the warm, hospitable welcome I had been looking forward to.

My usually reserved mother had been conned into scheduling a radio interview with her radio-producer friend in Melbourne. Apparently a story on the joys of house-swapping was just what listeners of the 2am ABC Radio timeslot wanted to hear. We racked our brains for something positive to say about our first 24 hours in the Telegraph slum. Nothing. Reluctantly, the radio interview was cancelled, my mum explaining, ‘If I went to air I’d be sued for defamation. I have nothing nice to say. Nothing nice at all.’

House-swapping is not uncommon. It is a surprisingly alluring concept for many singles, couples and families around the world.
One of the major international house-swap agencies, Homelink Organisation, processes more than 13,500 house-swaps from 69 countries each year. House-swapping is set to become ‘the next big thing’ following the release of *The Holiday*, a movie starring Hollywood A-listers Cameron Diaz, Jude Law, Kate Winslet and Jack Black.

It’s a pity my house-swapping experience bore no resemblance to the glamorous boy-meets-girl storyline depicted in *The Holiday*.

It didn’t bother me that we were staying in a public housing estate on the outskirts of the notoriously rough suburb of Telegraph (named appropriately, so I presumed, after the giant steel telecommunications towers that loomed overhead). To tell you the truth, I couldn’t care less that I was without the basic comforts of a warm bed, a clean shower and a flushing toilet. What annoyed me most was the unfairness of the situation.

We were to spend two weeks in Telegraph but were out after two days. A quick call to Hotel Esmerelda and a guaranteed vacancy set us packing. You’re probably wondering what state our house was in when we arrived home. I’m glad to say that it was intact and relatively clean.

Now I’m able to look back and laugh. It’s become a family joke. We laugh our heads off when we recount our first night in Telegraph—grumpy, tired and desperately trying to keep warm under the comfort of our coats.

I’ve realised that house-swapping is an exercise in trust. And while that trust can be breached, it’s best not to lose faith in human nature. I’m hoping for better luck next time.

Appendix 3: Personal Narrative Article

‘The Day I Stopped Killing Animals’

Andy Drewitt

I shot a duck once.

A couple of mates and I would make a week of it. We'd pack up some gear, a guitar, the Spam, about three firearms per man and drive North into the hills. After we set up camp, we would set about making small animals smaller. We loved going to the bush.

And I shot a duck. I remember, as we were enjoying the crisp morning air, the sideways sunshine, we shot a fox about three or four times. But it didn't drop, so we chased it to some scrub on the upper side of the dam, where we lost it. We sat on the dam wall for a while. We were a bit tired from our jog. The view was beautiful, mist creeping slowly up the valley.

It was Glenn who spotted the duck, paddling from behind some reeds. Had good eyes, Glenn. We all had a bit of a look through our rifle scopes and one or two of us said it seemed a bit small. But we were all a bit frustrated at losing that fox. And Glenn had the knack of marketing. ‘First to hit it doesn't have to wash up for the rest of the weekend.’ Glenn hated washing up. The only noise for the next second was the clunk of our rifle bolts loading to firing position.

It took some doing to make contact with that duck. We only had our .22 rifles—the shotguns were back at camp. And the duck, as soon
as the water started plopping up, did a dive, stayed down for about half a minute and came up again 10 to 15 metres away. We found that amazing, because it was quite a distance, quite a feat. Simon mumbled something about the beauty of God’s creation (we all suspected he had been to Sunday school as a kid).

And then I shot the duck.

The guys mumbled ‘nice shot’, probably thinking about how many dishes I used per meal. And we wandered off to look for another fox, or some rabbits, whatever. On the way back, passing the dam, we heard a noise. We crept up and had a look. It was another duck, the mate of the duck I had just shot. You could tell because it was pacing and crying.

I’d seen it before. When I was growing up, my parents kept poultry, and our geese—of which the wood ducks are closely related—would pair up for life. One of our ganders was taken by a dog and its mate cried for days, pacing, searching, wailing. So when I saw this duck, heard this duck, I told the boys I didn’t feel so good.

‘I’m going back to camp’, I said.

Glenn kept walking towards the dam, toward the noise.

‘I’ll be back soon’, he said.

That evening, I helped with the dishes. I couldn’t sit still.

And, after that weekend, I sold my guns.

Writing this piece forced me to think why I got involved in shooting to begin with.

Entertainment. Something to do.

But why did I choose shooting out of all forms of entertainment? Entertainment again. How often in movies and television are we confronted with guns?

It’s hard to think of 10 movies that don’t have at least one gun. Even *Watership Down* has one.

As I was growing up, the whole family would sit in front of the Friday-night western. When John and the boys weren’t out in the environment shooting ‘pilgrims’ or Indians, they were potting wildlife. And then, on Saturday and Sunday nights, there were the war, gangster and action genres. And, during the week, detective dramas. As I was growing up, I suspect I saw more images of destruction than creativity. I wonder if that created some sort of imbalance?
Well, I shot countless numbers of small animals for entertainment.

Speaking of entertainment, I shot a bird recently. An albatross, I think it was. A noble creature. But I shot it with a camera.

A couple of friends and I make weekends of it. We pack up some gear, a guitar, no Spam, about three cameras per man and drive to the Otway Ranges. After we set up camp, we set out capturing the environment creatively with black-and-white film. We love going to the bush.

Appendix 4: Personal Narrative Article
‘Going Home’
Corey Hague

I sat down rather despondently and looked at my watch.
I’d gotten mixed up and accidentally hopped on the wrong train, and now had a tedious, and—though there was no one around to laugh—embarrassing wait until the next one.
To further confound things, it was drawing close to midnight when the trains would stop running altogether. To be fair on myself, I was new to all this, catching trams in a new town. Town? It was most certainly a city.
Everywhere I looked there was something to remind me I was somewhere I didn’t know, and sitting on that cold, empty, suburban train station platform, I began to have the same nagging thought I’d had since I moved: was I doing the right thing?
Moving to a city without really knowing why (or even how) I was doing it. But I had, and now I knew what train not to get on, if nothing else.
I had eight cigarettes left in my packet and $13 in my bank account to buy the necessities for the next week.
This was nothing new and not the worst thing in the world. I have some no-name cereal (that’s an oxymoron, isn’t it?) and frozen
meat at home. At least it says that it's meat on the box, but whether or not it's strictly worthy of that title is another matter.

Plus, I'd discovered an Asian market a few blocks from my new place where food is quite cheap, not to mention adventurous. I'd had a few nasty surprises in the form of tastes that should never have been created, a result of appealing-looking packaging with lovely colours and illustrations but unreadable titles. I've learnt to stick with the noodles and to steer well clear of anything with a picture of a fish on it, so I knew I wouldn't starve if I did in fact ever make it home.

I lit one of my eight cigarettes and watched longingly as a train that was futile to me pulled to a noisy halt and ejaculated its eclectic array of passengers into the falsely lit evening.

Every conceivable type of person plus a few unconceivables piled out and looked sideways at me, as though I was a snake coiled waiting for prey in the form of wallets and purses.

I resisted the urge to yell at them that, rather than being an unsavoury thug, I was merely an idiot out of his depth in an unforgiving metropolis and would sooner help than harm; but I envisioned this group of strangers laughing at me and asking how I could help them when I can't even read a train timetable properly.

Besides, I've known for a while now that people's minds are impossible to change, and I already have enough challenges in my life. Beliefs are all people have, so they cling to them for grim life, despite how feeble it may be in reality.

So I just sat, smoking my ever-decreasing cigarette and wishing that I had a book with me. That way I'd be lost here and in words. I was reading Hemingway, trying to figure out why he did it. I doubted it gave answers within the pages, but perhaps I'd be the first ever to read between the lines. Maybe not though, I'm not that gifted.

All the passengers from the last train had left the station (after all, they got on the right one) except for an old fellow with a bicycle and even more unruly facial hair than myself.

He was quite tall, walking along with his rickety steed, held together with love and rust. When I saw his squinty dark eyes glowering towards me I knew he was coming to speak to me. I wasn't fearful despite the situation's possibilities and I had nothing to lose except seven cigarettes to this strange old man. When he was standing
close to me he asked me for a cigarette in an accent I couldn't place.
His wrinkled face alluded to not only a long life but also quite a hard
one and I thought it petty to begrudge him a simple cigarette when I
had a few, certainly more than he.

I was thinking about quitting anyway. I handed him one along
with a box of matches (further proof of my financial status) and he
asked me what I was doing.

‘Just waiting for the damn train home. I got on the wrong one by
mistake. I’m pretty new to all this stuff. What have you been up this
evening?’

‘Ahhh, I’ve been at a friend of my friend’s party. I did not know
anyone there and the ladies did not seem to like me so much’, he said
in his colourful way of talking.

‘I know what that can be like. I would’ve thought a handsome
young lad such as yourself would have no worries in convincing the
ladies of your worth?’

He laughed deeply at this and I felt better.

‘At home the ladies did like me, but here my luck is not so great
with the girls’, he told me with a chuckle, and apart from being
curious as to where home was, I was also pleased at the youthful use
of the word ‘girls’ when he was probably the better part of 70.

‘Where was home?’ I asked him, pretty sure that he wouldn’t be
offended by the question.

‘I was born in Romania and lived there until I was 18. My family
and I had to leave because of the war. We had two days to decide
where we wanted to go, Canada or Australia.

‘We’d been on a holiday to Austria once, so we decided on
Australia because it sounded the same. I was a fit young man but the
girls here didn’t like me so much. In Romania the girls my age were
working girls so we always had fun.

‘I was a handsome young man but the girls here were different.
But those girls at home, we had fun, and they made a good living as
well’, he told me in the accent I now knew to be diluted Romanian. He
clearly enjoyed reminiscing, even though times would have been
tough, much tougher than being stranded on a train platform at
night. I couldn’t even comprehend choosing which foreign country to
leave home for, in two days no less. I pictured him as a young man
looking for the things he liked to do in a new country, everyone
speaking a language he had no idea about. I took my feeling of helplessness and multiplied it by about a thousand, and I knew I still wasn’t close.

Yet here the man was, decades later, going to parties and enjoying the ‘free beers’ with only his bicycle and strangers to tell.

We’d finished our cigarettes and he continued talking, mostly about the girls back home and how they told him he was very handsome, even though the girls here didn’t seem to agree, when I heard my train coming near.

‘Well, here’s my train. I’d better grab it otherwise I’ll never get home. Take care of yourself and don’t let those girls get to you. We all struggle with girls, that’s what they’re for.’

He laughed his laugh, the same one he would’ve years ago, when he was younger and enjoying himself in places known here as brothels, just being himself. I handed him two more cigarettes, ‘for the road’, and walked through the sliding doors into my homebound train. I sat down and thought about that, home, and how it always seems in a state of change.

How it’s really wherever you end up, and no matter where you are you’ll be yourself. I’m still not sure whether or not I’m doing the right thing by living here, but I’ll keep being me, and perhaps when I’m his age I’ll know.

Appendix 5: Letter to the Editor

Michael Long

How do I tell my mother that Mr Howard said the stolen generation never took place? How does he explain to me why none of my grandparents are alive?

How do I explain to my mother, who was the most loved, trusting mother figure to all who knew her that Mr Howard is just the same as the people who were in power back then, cold-hearted pricks.

How do I tell my mother that her grandchildren were never affected by the stolen generation, that they don’t know their aunties and uncles, their people?

Does Mr Howard understand how much trauma my grandmother suffered. It ripped her heart out, what she went through. Even when she died, her baby was never returned home.

If you put yourself in their shoes—I have three children—and people come knocking at my door, grabbing my children, putting them in the back of a truck, yelling, screaming. Over my dead body, Mr Howard.

Back then my mother had no choice but to go. It was wrong, it did happen. It was Government policy.

My mother was taken when she was a baby, taken to Darwin and put on a boat—she had never seen the sea before—screaming and yelling, not knowing what was happening and then crying herself to
sleep. I call that trauma and abuse. I am so angry anyone could do this to a child just because their skin was a different colour.

Mr Howard, I can’t tell my mother because she has been dead for 17 years. Who is going to tell her story, the trauma and lies associated with her people and their families? Mr Howard, if you just walked in their shoes you would understand.

I am all for reconciliation, Mr Howard. I am part of the stolen generation. It’s like dropping a rock in a pool of water and it has a rippling effect, so don’t tell me it affects only 10 per cent. No amount of money can replace what your Government has done to my family.

Michael Long
Essendon Football Club

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Appendix 6: Tribute Essay

‘The World of Soap Operas’

Winnie Salamon

*The grandiloquent truth of gesture is one of life’s great occasions.*

Charles Baudelaire

*Carpe diem. That’s my motto. It means seize the day.*

Clarke Garrison, *The Bold and the Beautiful*

The virtue of television soap operas is that they bring people together. In fact, the kind of social cohesiveness they provide has probably not been experienced since pre-industrial village life. Soaps also enhance communication within families. Take, for example, grandparents.

It’s often hard for kids to communicate with their grandparents. Sometimes it was hard for me. After all, what does an eight-year-old *Wham* fan have to say to their sixty-something Austrian grandmother whose favourite past-times include doing find-a-word puzzles, cooking, and shopping at K-Mart? In that order. But there was one thing we had in common. *Days of Our Lives.*

Oma was a secret soap-fan and I was an out-of-the-closet *Days* aficionado. When I was away sick from school I’d lie on Oma’s black
Franco-Cozzo style couch and we'd watch *Days*. Every now and then Oma would yell, 'Rabbish!' But afterwards we'd spend hours discussing what had just happened and what we anticipated would happen. We discussed the characters like they were our friends.

Later on, when teen angst meant that I wouldn't be caught dead with my family in public, I wouldn't be without them during the soaps. My brother and I would watch *Degrassi Junior High*, then Mum and Dad would join us for *East Enders*, and afterwards leave us to watch *Home and Away*.

We'd yell at the screen, cringe during the embarrassing moments and constantly criticise the actors’ looks. We loved it when our real-life childhood friend played a dubious punk rebel on *Home and Away*: that an ordinary person could infiltrate the elusive world of soap operas seemed to us irrefutable proof that there was not only a god but also a heaven (preferably one where soaps screened 24/7).

But soaps don't only bring family members together. In the inner-suburbs of Melbourne and other big cities, where most people walk around and ignore each other, I've had country-town like bonding experiences with complete strangers, all because of a mutual love of, say, *B&B*.

Just the other day I was waiting in the queue at K-Mart, flicking through *TV Soap* magazine. I turned to my boyfriend and said, ‘I can't believe Brooke and Ridge might get back together.’ My boyfriend, who unfortunately doesn't share my love of the soap opera genre, merely grunted, but the young guy behind the checkout perked up.

‘Do you watch *Bold and the Beautiful*?’ he asked.

When I said yes the checkout guy said, ‘It’s my favourite show.’

It’s unlikely that this eighteen year old and I had much in common in real-life. But it didn’t matter because we talked like old friends about recent plot developments, and favourite characters, and how we’ve never forgotten the heart-wrenching death of beautiful-saint-like-Becky to cancer.

And it’s not as though we stand around discussing brilliant scripts and hidden meanings and great acting and fabulous direction. I think you’d be hard-pressed to find anyone involved in the day-time soap industry who claims the shows to be fabulous, ground breaking art.

That’s not why annoyingly ironic 20-somethings love soaps or why middle-aged housewives or aged pensioners get a kick out of
shows like *B&B*. It’s not as though we don’t notice the dim lighting or the sometimes dubious acting or the inconsistent plot lines. Of course it was dodgy that Macy died in a car crash and came back as a ghost but then turned out to be perfectly healthy and hiding out in Italy for a couple of years.

But to us, these things don’t matter. What matters is the fun you have discussing the show with fellow fans, or the way you can just sit there for half an hour and become engrossed in the ridiculous lives of rich and glamorous and surgically enhanced people who have nothing to do with you. It’s gossip without the guilt and messy ramifications. It’s like the pleasure of being engrossed in a trashy novel that isn’t going to end for years and years and years.

As soap opera aficionados we want the image of passion and anger and happiness and despair, but we don’t want these emotions presented in their real-life complexity. We don’t want to spend years watching Macy’s family grieve over her death in a quiet, poignant and realistic way. We want the kind of grief that makes women faint and men throw large, heavy objects. We crave the loud, embarrassing tears that somehow don’t make mascara run; we love and cheesy dialogue like, ‘That is what love is, melting ourselves together …’

It’s not social commentary we’re after (although that has occasionally been known to seep in). We don’t want satire or parody or realism. What we want is sheer spectacle, an exaggerated version of reality.

When Brooke gave birth to her daughter’s husband’s child we were appalled; when Amber kicked her addiction to prescription drugs we were proud; when Taylor died at the hands of the crazy and merciless Sheila we were traumatised. Our emotional responses to soaps are simple and pure, much easier to understand than any we might experience in real-life. With soaps we’re quick to judge and we’re quick to change our minds. One week we hate Amber, the next we love her. Our emotions and those of the characters are black-and-white intelligible.

Soap operas entertain us, they give us something to talk about when we meet people with whom we’d otherwise have nothing in common, and they present life in a way that is both unrealistically simple and absurdly complicated. With their chiselled jaws, large
breasts and wrinkle-free faces, the characters in soap-land give us a world in which Good and Evil are easily distinguishable; a reality we can laugh at and cry with; and a microcosm we can completely comprehend.
Appendix 7: Magazine Feature Article

‘What Are Your Neighbours Up To?’

Winnie Salamon

Desmond—‘Man of God’

‘I didn’t used to be like this’, says Desmond Hynes, Australia’s most famous ‘man of God’ who lives in a predominately Jewish suburb in Melbourne and decorates his front yard with ‘praise Jesus’ signs. ‘There was a time when I was drinking, smoking and fornicating. When I turned 50 I got very sick and prayed to God, he gave me the strength to turn my life around.’

Desmond hasn’t touched a drink for the past 14 years and prefers to spend his time preaching in the streets and painting Jesus propaganda.

‘I buy everything from the op-shop and decorate it. I like to spread the word in any way I can. I look out for anything that’s unusual and has an impact. I don’t go to Church, most organised religion is just about making money.

‘My neighbours don’t say much, they have never complained. I was quite good friends with the people on the left but they moved away recently. I haven’t had a chance to meet my new neighbours yet. A lot of people go and visit the historic mansion across the road. Then, when they come out they’ll come over and take a picture of my front
yard. Some people are very nice, but others can be quite abusive. Sometimes they say I’m crazy. I say, ‘Yes, I’m crazy. I’m crazy for Jesus.’

With all its signs, Desmond’s front yard might stop traffic, but the inside of his house is like a bizarre kitsch art gallery with an entire room devoted to the shopping buggies Desmond decorates with Jesus signs. He has piles of t-shirts painted with slogans including a Bart Simpson one that says, ‘Don’t abuse Jesus, man.’

‘I love the Lord and I love people so I think it’s worth all the abuse—I have never been bashed, God protects me. I don’t have many friends because lots of people think I’m mad and don’t understand me. My best friend is my pen pal. He’s on death row in America and read about me in a magazine. I have lived in this house for 30 years and whenever the landlady comes over she ignores all my decorations. She never says a word about it.’

Never been married, Desmond lives with his younger sister Shirley who says she’s proud of her brother. ‘I love what he does, but I don’t feel I’m pure enough to go out preaching with him. Sometimes I have a bit of a drink and I know I shouldn’t do that. I’d feel like a hypocrite if I did Desmond’s work.’

Desmond shakes his head. ‘I don’t believe anybody is pure, but I am determined to make more people go to heaven and do good. I don’t care if people call me a moron or an imbecile. Jesus is the wind beneath my wings.’

Suburban Gothic
Six years ago David, a data installation technician, was stuck in an unhappy marriage, had low self-esteem and little sense of self. Then he turned thirty, grew his hair, separated from his wife and made his first Gothic-style costume.

‘When I got divorced I felt like I could do what I wanted. I’ve always liked horror and Gothic films and even cartoons like Scooby Doo and Batman, but I never had the opportunity to explore those interests. One day I went to a costume ball and got all this attention because of the costume I wore. It was an incredible feeling and it encouraged me to consider making my own costumes. I’d spent a large part of my marriage alone and was very shy.’

Since the costume ball David’s made around 8 or 9 costumes including ‘Lord Necro’, an absolutely amazing suit of scale-like armor
made of ordinary spoons. He’s also made a pair of homemade boots that look like goat’s hooves and a handmade, lined, purple leather coat.

‘Lord Necro is my favourite, it took around 2 years off and on to make and weighs 47kg. I guess I’ve spent the last five years remodelling myself. I’ve got piercings and tattoos and can get quite obsessive about costume making. While I’m creating something I feel good about myself and when it’s over I’m not quite sure what to do.’

David isn’t the only one undergoing a transformation. His recently purchased home in leafy suburban Melbourne is becoming his Gothic fantasy house with multi-coloured walls and costumes displayed throughout. He lives with his eight-year-old son who also loves dressing up in costume and enjoys showing off his outfits on fancy dress days at school.

‘I’m going to introduce myself to the neighbours slowly, there are lots of grey-haired ladies around here’, David laughs. ‘Some of my friends and family thought it was a bit strange when I started costuming. My Dad often looks at them and shakes his head, but my mother, a dressmaker, loves it. Even my work mates are supportive and I’ve been doing volunteer work for the Carlton Football club since I was a kid. They’ve been great, though it did take a little while for them to get used to it. I even went to the Grand Final party dressed as a vampire.’ Miranda, his girlfriend, is a professional freelance costume maker herself.

‘I wouldn’t wear a costume out in public unless it was for a special occasion like a party and I don’t walk around the house dressed up for no reason. I wouldn’t say my personality changes depending on the particular costume and in some ways I still feel self-conscious when I’m in costume. At the same time it’s empowering and I feel much more confident. I feel like I’m finally understanding and enjoying who I am.’

**Reptile Keepers**

From the outside it looks like your typical house in country suburbia. You can smell the sea air and the front door is often left open. Inside it’s just as ordinary. Sure, there’s a pair of rainbow lorikeets that sit on your shoulder and fly around freely, and there do tend to be a few
more snakes than usual featured in the family snaps hanging on the kitchen wall. But you’d still never guess what’s out back.

Mip and Mick Pugh have been in love with reptiles most of their lives. Nowadays they have over 400 lizards, snakes, tortoises, geckos—you name it—living in their average-sized back yard. They have snakes eggs incubating in heated containers and mice and guinea pigs breeding for food supplies. Over 40 species of snake live in one shed alone and glass and wire cages, bathtubs cover most of the front lawn. It’s not exactly a shocking snake pit, more like the reptile section of a zoo.

‘We started this collection about 12 years ago’, Mip says. ‘We had an even bigger collection before that, but there’s a lot of red tape that goes with keeping reptiles and because we didn’t fully understand the licensing laws they were taken from us.’

The Pugh’s two grown sons haven’t exactly adopted their parent’s love of reptiles, but the popularity of lizards and snakes has definitely increased and reptile theft is now quite common. ‘Occasionally we get the odd lizard escape and when that happens, the neighbours keep an eye out for it, they’re pretty good. We’ve never had anyone complain about living next door to a shed full of snakes! They know we’re responsible and would never let a snake get out. In the past people were taught to fear reptiles, but they’re becoming more educated now. They’re even quite fashionable.

‘It’s getting so I hardly ever have a minute to myself’, Mip continues while Mick points out Lady, his favourite snake. ‘I’m up until 2 every morning finishing off all the work I’ve got to do. As well as caring for the animals themselves, there’s a lot of bookkeeping that needs to be done and we run a website (www.rosh.com.au/vaah). I think I’d like to quit in a few years and travel around Australia, but I want to get a few more species first. When we do leave we’ll have to sell and give away everything which won’t be too difficult considering how popular reptiles are nowadays.’

Mip and Mick name most of their reptiles and seem to be able to tell them apart without any trouble. They’ve bought hundreds of reptiles and native animals back from the brink of death and could spend hours telling sad and passionate stories about animals they thought would never make it through the night living to a ripe old age.
‘Some people say we’re crazy’, Mip laughs. ‘It’s expensive and
time consuming but I love animals. It’s a fascinating hobby.’

The Toy Man
Constructing a six foot dragon out of foam is not an unusual past
time for Jason, a 25-year-old computer programmer. He lives in an immac-
ulately tidy brick veneer on the outskirts of suburban Melbourne and
his small bedroom is overflowing with home-made Disney-like animal
costumes and stuffed toys.

With his Tigger backpack hanging on the bed and favourite
stuffed goat on the floor, Jason’s bedroom should look like it belongs
to someone at least 15 years younger. But it doesn’t. No child would
have adult-sized cartoonish wolf and fox costumes lying around and
size 11 boots by the bed.

‘I made JAWolf, my first animal costume, four years ago. I’d been
thinking about making one for ages and finally took the plunge. I
loved the process of designing and making a costume, it was almost
liberating. I love animals, especially wolves and think a creature that’s
half human, half animal is really sexy. When I’m in costume I feel
more free and confident.’

So far Jason’s made two full body animal, or ‘furry’, costumes, a
wolf and a fox that look like better-made versions of the ones you see
people wearing in shopping centers. He’s also dressed as a kinky cat
in a studded bondage-style collar and runs a personal web site dedi-
cated to the three characters he’s created.

‘I still live with my parents so they’ve always known how much I
love making and dressing up in costume. In fact, my mother is a
seamstress and sometimes she helps me with the sewing and gives
me advice. My brother is accepting, although he thinks it’s pretty
weird.’ Jason says. ‘I’m open about who I am and all my friends and
most of my work mates know about my furry side. I have never had a
girlfriend who hasn’t known about it before we got together so the
people I do have relationships with are usually pretty comfortable
with it. The best relationship I’ve ever had was with a girl I met
through a furry group. Many girls do lose interest when they find out,
but in the end it’s their loss.’

Most of the time Jason wears his costume to fancy dress parties
and at home. He occasionally ventures out in public dressed as his
favourite character, JAWolf and admits to loving the attention he receives. ‘One of the funniest experiences was having coffee in a busy café dressed in costume. It felt great.’

‘My fantasy is to have an entire house that I can fill with as much furry stuff as I like. I won’t just be limited to my bedroom and study, it would be a kind of furry kingdom.’

'Pardonnez-moi, you want me to take them off?'
'Oui oui, clothes off. Je t’aide. Leave undies on if you want.'

It's not everyday I find myself being told to expose my stark white flesh to a room full of Moroccan strangers. As I was undressing and attempting to cover my chest simultaneously, I had that talk with myself; c'mon, it's all part of the experience, just copy the others and act like this is a normal bath for you.

But it really wasn't normal for me, which is why I enjoyed being in a Moroccan hammam so much. This sauna-bathing-cleansing experience opened my eyes to real Moroccan life; the one underneath the djellabas and veils, and the one tourists seldom see.

Had it not been for Houssaine, I too would have been one of those tourists. The vivid colours of the clothing, the intoxicating smell of spices at the markets and organised chaos of the cities would have shielded me from seeing the local side of Morocco. I would have brought home artefacts and stories from the foreign land, yet seen the country through the lens of a camera rather than the eyes of a Moroccan. Befriending Houssaine unwrapped a completely different
side of this evocative country; one that is open to foreigners, but only those who are prepared to step outside their comfort zones.

Too often we travel to new countries but inoculate ourselves against truly experiencing the new culture. After a day of sightseeing, we return to a hotel room, switch on the television for a dose of CNN, and have dinner at a Westernised ‘local’ restaurant. Sure creature comforts are important to some, but if you want to unburden yourself of them, Morocco is a great place to experiment.

Firstly, stay in riads rather than hotels. These old and quintessentially Moroccan mansions have become guesthouses and celebrate their individuality. They vary in price and condition yet all offer a relaxed and cosy stay—a retreat to enjoy your mint tea without the hustle and bustle of the city outside. If you’re interested in heading to the Sahara desert, why not spend a night in a tent and wake up at 4.30 a.m. for a camel ride? You’ll meet other tourists as they come for the ride in bus loads from nearby hotels, and you’ll captivate them recounting your experience of sleeping in a nomad tent in the Sahara.

These adventures are there to be had, but they are off the beaten track and can’t be found in a Lonely Planet book. Of course still go to the well-known bizarres and souks, but take a local in hand rather than a guidebook. The Moroccan people are open and extremely responsive to a smile and a bonjour, which is the best way to make friends there. I was lucky enough to be invited to a friend of Houssaine’s house and share the Ramadan ‘breakfast’ at sunset with his family. Though most of them could speak neither French nor English, we communicated through the universal language of body gestures, laughing and lots of ‘yummmm’ when I tried the exotic new flavours in front of me. Most agree home-cooked food is the best, and the home-cooked smorgasbord of Moroccan seafood, soups, couscous and pastries were no exception.

Few travellers would agree that if you’re looking for a relaxing and spiritual awakening, you should head to the heart of bustling and ancient Fes. But that’s where I found my hammam; in a local street and on an insignificant Tuesday night. That experience though, turned out to be one of the most significant, and I could have only found out about it from my local friend Houssaine.
Sure I went to the other major cities and tourist sites in Morocco, but that was mostly to tick the boxes that I had been there. Getting off the tourist track offered a wealth of experience and unforeseen adventures, but only because I was prepared to take that first step. Though this may not be ideal for all, if you are willing to experiment outside your comfort zone, a new world will unfold in front of you.

A shorter version of this was published in the Melbourne *Herald Sun*, 17 February 2008.
First Draft
The ethereal chant of a Greek priest pierces the balmy air on Good Friday eve. His rich voice resonates against the white washed walls of Athens’s deserted streets. There is not a soul to be seen. The streets are mysteriously emptied of the daily throb of American tourists, Greek families, and peddlers, who are eager to draw your attention to a ‘good Tabepna. Just a little walk from here … kafenio, wine, good price …’ Athens grinds to a halt on Easter Friday as churches beckon believers to evening prayer. I arrive in Athens on such an evening. Still fazed by my experience of the lax Greek customs, I clamber the southern slope of the Acropolis to view the Good Friday procession. A few tourists have the same idea. Many of them bring with them a measure of Greek spirit: a bottle of the licorice flavoured and potent national drink: ouzo.

Athens looks like any other city from the top of the hill. Hundreds of lights glisten like a receding tide across the cityscape. There is something special about looking down on Athens from the floodlit marble gleam of the Acropolis. The Pathenon forms the crowning centerpiece of Athens, much as it did as part of the ancient
Pericles’ city hundreds of years ago. However today, the Pathenon is the faded remnants of a golden age, once marked by colossal buildings and gold plated statues.

Now smog chokes the capital’s high rise buildings, yet I can still see the ancient candle-lit procession up Lykavittos Hill. From my perch, the shrouded brier appears engulfed with flames as it progresses up the hill to the Chapel of Agios Georgos. The torchbearers’ silk robes and gold headrests capture the final rays of the setting sun. Easter festivities in Greece are a refreshing change to the consumer-driven frenzy of Western countries. The spiritual flame still burns brightly in the Orthodox Christian calendar.

Resurrection mass begins at 11 p.m. on Saturday night. The streets fill with worshipers, who desperately cup the flames of their flickering candles. The ceremony of the lighting candles is the most significant moment in the orthodox year, as it symbolises Christ’s resurrection.

Lent ends with a bang at midnight as the city’s streets erupt with a concoction of homemade firecrackers. Gleeful children squeal after each explosion and beckon to their friends to take part in the commotion. Seemingly oblivious to the racket, their parents and relatives dance in wide circles further down the street.

An old man with a toothless grin spots me as unwitting outsider and seizes me by the hand. He twists me around and promptly pinches me on the bottom with a rich chortle. It seems that the typical male charm that Australians’ associate with Greeks is never long abandoned during religious festivities.

The splitter-splatter of a rotating spit and the distinct smell of roast lamb heralds Easter Sunday morning. Athenians are enjoying an outdoor feast. The streets are alive with the buzz of children’s laughter, men’s jovial banter, and the rising voices of women eager to be heard over the top of one another. Only the dogs under the table are remain quiet, as they devour the discarded bones and unwanted tidbits tossed to them.

As lamb is not my favourite food, I follow my nose to the closest bakery. I gawk at the windows, which are filled with red-dyed Easter eggs embedded in twists of sweet bread and sticky custard pastry. Like a little child in a lolly shop, I sample all the pastries, each sweeter and more indulgent than the next. The crisp pastry of Katafii melts with a sweet explosion of honey and nuts. Katafii from my favourite
Carlton cafe is simply an inferior replica of the mouth-watering original.

As the afternoon progresses, the Greek voices rise in proportion to their owners’ merriment. Retsina, an aromatic red wine, flows freely as a fruity accompaniment to the meal of roast lamb. I consume Retsina to my limited capacity and carefully slip away from the raucous festivities.

My next stop is the local tourist shop, The Faithful Greek, where I purchase a Greek recipe book, which I check has my favourite pastry recipe. I will treasure the book on my return as a memento of my true Easter experience in Athens.

Published Version

The chant of a priest pierces the air on Good Friday eve. Athens is grinding to a halt as churches beckon believers to evening prayer. I clamber up the southern slope of the Acropolis to view a procession. A few other tourists have the same idea and bring a bottle of the potent national drink, the licorice-flavoured ouzo.

I can see the candle-lit procession up Lykavittos Hill to the Chapel of Agios Giorgios. The torch-bearers’ silk robes and golden head-dresses reflect the rays of the setting sun.

Easter in Greece is celebrated a week later than the non-Orthodox commemoration and is a refreshing change from the consumer-driven frenzy of many Western countries.

The spiritual flame burns brightly in the Orthodox Christian calendar. Resurrection Mass begins at 11 p.m. on Saturday. The streets fill with worshippers, who cup their flickering candles in their hands. Lighting candles is the most significant moment in the Orthodox year because it symbolises Christ’s resurrection.

Lent ends with a bang at midnight when the streets erupt with home-made firecrackers. Children squeal after each explosion and beckon their friends to take part in the commotion. Seemingly oblivious to the racket, parents and relatives dance in wide circles farther down the street.

An old man with a toothless grin chortles as he grabs me by the hand, twists me around and pinches my bottom.

The spatter of a rotating spit and the smell of roast lamb herald Easter Sunday morning. Athenians are enjoying an outdoor feast.
The streets are alive with children's laughter, men's banter and the rising voices of women trying to be heard over one another. Only dogs are quiet as they eat the bones and titbits tossed to them.

I follow my nose to a bakery with windows filled with red-dyed Easter eggs embedded in twists of sweet bread and sticky custard pastry. I sample the pastries, each sweeter and more indulgent than the next. The crisp pastry of Katafii melts with an explosion of honey and nuts.

As the afternoon progresses, voices rise in proportion to their owner's merriment. Retsina, an aromatic wine, flows freely as a fruity accompaniment to the meal of roast lamb.

My next stop is a tourist shop, The Faithful Greek, where I buy a book with my favourite pastry recipes. It's a book I will treasure as a memento of my great Easter experience in Athens.

Appendix 10: Op-ed Article

‘Hey, Pollies, You’re in My Space. Get Out!’

Brendan Lawley

‘You got one pimped out page K Rudd,’ says ‘Woody’ in a comment posted on Kevin Rudd’s myspace website. Continuing the trend started by the American Democrats’ policy launch on YouTube this year, the Australian election has shaped up into a digital affair. And as one of the teenagers targeted by these campaigns, I’m embarrassed.

Lindsay McDougall, aka ‘The Doctor’, from radio station Triple J sums it up best from a youth perspective. ‘Seeing John Howard on YouTube is like having your dad add you as a friend on myspace,’ he says. ‘It just feels wrong.’

Rudd and Howard are both guilty of dumbing-down political debate in the way they are using the internet. Pithy YouTube statements and glittering websites divert debate and benefit no one but the media, who lap it up because it is entertaining. But if entertainment comes at the cost of real discussion, then we could be in trouble.

I don’t object to the increased use of the internet in political campaigns. It was inevitable—although I’m sure it irritates those people who see the internet as entertainment, or as a great escape from the barrage of politics provided by other media forms.
Ultimately, though, I’m sure we can all see the immense opportunities for exposure provided by the internet. I don’t believe anyone would expect our politicians not to exploit this resource. But if we look a little more closely at some of the techniques being used, we will all feel that familiar twinge of cringe coming on.

Howard uploaded his first video announcement on YouTube early in September. He has since barraged the site with many more, presenting his policies in short clips on issues such as climate change and Aboriginal rights, all the way to terrorism and the Tasmanian hospital system. His second announcement outlined a plan for an army gap-year program for school leavers, clearly identifying the target audience for the use of this technology as young adults.

Perhaps it is a sign of the absurdity of Howard’s youth mobilisation campaign that a search on ‘Prime Minister John Howard’ returns more parodies on the announcements than the announcements themselves. Various forms of animations, cartoons, puppet shows and many overdubbed versions of the speeches pop up.

Internet users are clearly not taking Howard’s campaign seriously.

While the Prime Minister’s addresses to the masses on YouTube never stood a chance of roping in youths, Kevin Rudd has had more success with his internet campaign. Rudd has used popular social networking websites myspace and Facebook to great effect, gaining thousands of ‘friends’ who voice their support for him by posting comments.

Rudd’s bright T-shirts have become cult collectables to uber-cool fashionistas and the favourite items of clothing for K-Rudd’s ‘fans’. Thousands have signed up to receive ‘Kmail’ and have downloaded the computer and mobile phone logo wallpapers. Since then Rudd has received rock-star-like receptions in schools across Australia.

Australian youths have fallen for Kevin Rudd, the product. A comment left by ‘Zac’ on the myspace page exemplifies Rudd’s success: ‘dude, u r a bloody champion, if i was old enough i would dead set vote for u!’ These words reveal the biggest problem for Rudd, as well. The people responding to Rudd’s campaign cannot actually help decide the outcome of the election.
Another casualty in this media mobilisation war is public debate.

Ideally, the internet provides many avenues for the public to engage in national policy. This potential has not been realised in Australian politics. The comment boxes on Kevin Rudd’s myspace require authentication from the Labor media office. This means that nothing disparaging slips through. Although this is probably justified by the possibilities for inappropriate content to be posted, there remains no provision for genuine public engagement with the parties through the internet.

Worse yet, the clutter of new-media political products threatens to overshadow important political debate.

In the aftermath of the nation’s shock horror at Kevin Rudd’s visit to a ‘partial nudity’ strip club, a Melbourne men’s club, Goldfingers, befriended Rudd on myspace. Rudd’s website managers accepted the offer, as they probably do most requests. A media maelstrom soon broke out and conservative parents groups were out in force offering their damnation. Rudd was suddenly irresponsible and unaccountable. The Goldfingers myspace was soon suspended.

Meanwhile, another day passes and the federal election draws closer. Another day wasted on triviality rather than policy.

Appendix 11: Book Review

Selected Poems by Les Murray
Reviewed by Gus Goswell

One of the most revered, most hated, most praised and most criticised figures in Australian literature, Les Murray is Australia's best-known living poet. He has been awarded the Mondello prize, T.S. Eliot Prize, Queen's Gold Medal for poetry and many other local and international honours. In 1999 he helped then Prime Minister John Howard draft a preamble to the Australian Constitution. He has been officially designated a Living National Treasure and his name is often accompanied by the appellation 'Australia's national poet'.

But who is the real Les Murray? Warrior for the Christian deity and for the forces of Australian neo-liberalism? Poet-Seer of the Australian rural landscape? Faithful and empathetic chronicler of our changing nation? Reactionary critic and propagandist? Murray himself is clearly conscious of the mythic proportion of his reputations. He writes in his contributor note to the John Tranter edited Best Australian Poetry 2007 that: ‘Les Murray was invented in the late 1960s as a bogeyman to frighten Aust. Lit. students. Being of only tenuous reality, he found it easy to ascend into space and study the patterns of human lighting on the planet below.’

Promoted by his current publisher Black Inc. as an ideal introduction to Murray's work, this latest Selected contains poems from all
of Murray’s published collections except for his two verse novels. As a reader who, although aware of Murray’s many reputations and familiar with some of his more recent work, hasn't made a systematic study of his writing, I found in this volume my first opportunity to experience the breadth of his output and test the validity of the Murray myths.

Murray’s reputation as a rural poet asserts itself from the opening pieces. ‘Driving through Sawmill Town’ and ‘Driving to the Adelaide Festival 1976 via the Murray Valley Highway’ and the ten pages consumed by ‘The Buladelah-Taree Holiday Song Cycle’ are noteworthy early poems. While many of these poems are clearly the work of an outsider (as the driving motif suggests), in other poems Murray positions himself as an intimate within the landscapes and the lives of the characters he records. These poems are full of gum trees, barbeque smoke, billabongs ‘pregnant with swirls’ and other images of an Australia and its inhabitants that exist more as myth than reality for many Australians. Yet Murray is certainly a poet with the ability to throw a visual image onto the mind of his reader. In ‘The Hypogeum’, for example, he gives us ‘a black lake glimmering among piers, electric lighted,/windless, of no depth’ and the ‘rare shafts of daylight’ that ‘waver at their base.’

There is plenty of evidence to suggest that Murray has attempted to capture the particular rhythm of the Australian vernacular in these poems, although his conception of Australian-ness in speech, like many of aspects of his work, has been criticised over the years. A poem such as ‘The New Hieroglyphics’ gives further insight into Murray’s fascination with our diction and its delivery. Australian animals are also a fascination of Murray’s. Particularly noteworthy is the series of poems from his 1992 release Translations from the Natural World that are written from the point of view of the animal. ‘The Cows on Killing Day’, for example, is a disturbing account of slaughter from the perspective of another member of the species:

Me in the peed yard. A stick goes out from the human and cracks, like the whip. Me shivers and falls down with the terrible, the blood of me, coming out behind an ear.

Me, that other me, down and dreaming in the bare yard.
Here Murray’s ability to find a poem and a perspective in his observance of daily life is on display, as is his love of stories. Many of his poems are really verse tales of rural and city life. A recurring element within is the poet’s family history, with voyages to Australia mapped out and a mother figure emerging as a key motif. Religion, and the poet’s relationship with God, is another theme that spans decades of output. This Selected, like many of his other books, is dedicated ‘To the glory of God’. In ‘You Find You Can Leave It All’ he piously asks, ‘God, at the end of prose, / somehow be our poem’. The tone is altered, but no less earnest, in ‘The Last Hellos’:

Snobs mind us off religion
nowadays, if they can.
Fuck them. I wish you God.

A short piece attacks ‘Higamous hogamus/Western intellectuals’ and makes observations regarding poetics, as well as politics. Murray’s close association with the journal Quadrant seems to suggest something about his personal politics, but in this collection the poems tend to advocate a general disdain for political dogma, although collective action is also lauded in ‘Demo’. While often insightful, there is a didactic element to many of these poems which limits their success as music, as pure image. In the best of Murray’s poems, image and emotion are inseparable. In others, the image contorts within the screw-press of the poet’s opinion while emotion hardens into conviction. In the weaker poems the voice is too literal and susceptible to verbiage. Yet in ‘Poetry and Religion’, an unwieldy piece that stretches too far beyond its potential, for example, there is evidence of Murray’s skill; a persistent reader may discover the poem within the poem:

Nothing’s said till it’s dreamed out in words
and nothing’s true that figures in words only.

Murray’s experiments with form can be found across the collection, but most of the poems are written freely. While Murray’s lines become tauter as the collection continues, and his line breaks become more aggressive and challenging, the basic themes and forms are explored over and over. You get the sense that Murray found a poetic
voice early on, and while he has learnt much about modulating that voice, he has felt little need for a new tongue. But the voice that speaks within the later poems isn't necessarily any more confident than that of the earlier pieces. If anything, the poet reveals an increasing sense of vulnerability, often through seemingly personal poems recalling a childhood. In ‘Burning Want’ we read:

But all my names were fat-names, at my new town school.
Between classes, kids did erocide: destruction of sexual morale.
Mass refusal of unasked love; that works. Boys cheered as seventeen-year-old girls came on to me, then ran back whinnying ridicule.

The pieces taken from his 2002 collection Poems the Size of Photographs provided welcome relief at a point in this Selected when the form and content of his longer work had become predictable, even wearying. In these shorter poems, I rediscovered Murray’s sharpness, his ability to deftly render image into word. Here is a complete poem, ‘Visitor’:

He knocks at the door
and listens to his heart approaching.

The work that follows the Photographs poems is more anarchic. ‘Panic Attack’ immediately precedes ‘Sunday on a Country River’ and, strangely, Murray seems to simultaneously be at his most contemporary, and most traditional, in these later pieces. The final poem in the book is ‘Industrial Relations’, a perplexing poem that seems both to confirm and contradict antonymous interpretations of Murray’s politics, poetics and philosophy.

Murray’s Selected Poems is an opportunity to find the points where reputation and the written record intersect and, importantly, to hear the poet speak in his own language. Something of the breadth of Murray’s work is on display here. The themes and forms that have contributed to his reputations are also on display, as are his strengths and weaknesses. The result is a book of almost three hundred
pages that reveals much about our most recognisable living poet and the fascinatingly contested place he has hewn for himself within the poetic landscape of Australia.

Exhibition reviewed: Nick Mangan—In the Crux of Matter
Sutton Gallery, 254 Brunswick Street, Fitzroy, until 22 October

An unusual and sophisticated sense of space and perspective informs Nick Mangan's drawing and sculpture.

Put plainly, Mangan imagines the shape of space, but not in a purely abstract sense. His sculptural articulations are always situated in actual objects, that is, they are explorations of a certain kind of space. And it is the kind of space that Mangan finds most fascinating, that is the most fascinating thing about his work.

Mangan imagines shapes in the space inside industrial objects. Previously, it has been in wheelie bins and sub-woofer car speakers. In this sell-out exhibition at Sutton Gallery (his first solo show), it is the shapes of a breath passing through an industrial respirator, the shapes of the heat and energy coming off the chassis of a road bike and the shapes of the light and movement inside a photocopier that has captured his imagination.

His use of ready-made industrial objects as the site for these abstract formal investigations reveals an intriguing creative perspective, which seems to be formed by the equal forces of a rigorous
commitment to the lessons of fine art’s canon and an adolescence (not long left behind) in Geelong.

Situating these sophisticated formal investigations in a context that points to the mundane mechanics of the everyday places Mangan square where he belongs—on the tail-end of the generation of Melbourne artists emerging in the 1990s on the 1st Floor-Gertrude Street axis, whose work displays both a deep commitment to the rigours of fine art practice and a highly developed sense of contemporary art’s cultural contingency.

Appendix 13: Researched Article
‘An Integral Part of Democratic Debate? Talk Radio and the Public Sphere’
Carolyne Lee

Abstract
After establishing former Prime Minister John Howard's preference for radio appearances over all other types of media, I examine the extent to which a particular iteration of talkback has the capacity to enhance public sphere activity, given the view that this medium is being strategically utilised by politicians to gain virtually uncontested access to listeners. This paper addresses the necessity for program-specific analysis in radio research by focusing on Jon Faine's Morning Program on ABC Radio 774 (Melbourne), an examination that occurs principally through a morning's observation of Faine's program. My findings suggest that while a certain amount of 'top-down' flow of information is unavoidable, some contestation of ideas often occurs, mitigating politicians' exploitation of at least this particular program. Faine's program does, moreover, seem to give the impression of an acceptance of listeners calls on topics that affect their daily lives, even though only a small number of 'ordinary' callers are featured each day. My observations suggest this program does offer processes that enhance public sphere activity, although with some qualifications.
Introduction

It is now no longer news that the period of the Howard government was one in which we saw politicians make increasing use of radio. Indeed, there is a view that there has been ‘strategic utilisation of talkback radio by politicians over mainstream news media …’ (Ward, 2002: 21). John Howard, in particular, used radio appearances more than any of his predecessors, favouring this medium for communicating with the public, mainly—it has been suggested—because it enabled him to bypass tough questioning by the Press Gallery. This may well have been a factor, since it is true that radio talk show hosts are generally ‘not experts on government policy’, as Jon Faine (2005b), host of the ABC Radio 774 Morning show, admits. Faine believes, however, that ‘listeners prefer to hear the politicians talk to non-experts’ (Faine, 2005b).

Whether or not this is so, as Ward (2002: 24) has shown, the ‘strategy of exploiting talkback radio to gain unfiltered access to voters worked well’ for the Liberals first during the 1996 election campaign, and Howard continued this practice from then onwards. A brief categorisation of John Howard’s 2006 interviews alone showed that radio was clearly his preferred medium, significantly outranking television (34 radio versus 13 television), as well as ‘doorstops’ (28) in four of the six months in the first half of 2006. Most of these appearances were on talk or talkback radio, reflecting a situation in which radio programs that include talkback segments have become ‘the preferred organ for national and state leaders to sell policies and ideas, [and] to get voter feedback …’ (Faine, 2005a: 169). This preference is clearly because of talkback radio’s reach: it is the dominant AM format and between 100,000 and 200,000 voters can be listening ‘at any instant in a Sydney or Melbourne major interview’ (Faine, 2005a: 179). Radio has maintained its dominance as the medium of choice for accessing news. Such popularity is contrary to previous predictions of radio’s demise, and may be due to the ease with which radio can be consumed while the listener is simultaneously engaged in other activities, such as commuting, working, or walking. It may also be due to its unique participatory function—its ability to provide an opportunity for listeners to feel they can ‘have their say or exercise their democratic rights …’ (Turner et al., 2006: 109). And also, while of course depending very much on the particular program and the
host, there is quite simply—at least in one talk radio host’s view—the capacity for talkback radio to provide to a far greater extent than television, a ‘contest of ideas’ (Faine, 2005a: 171). If Faine’s assertion is correct, talkback radio—or at least his particular brand of it—would seem to be capable of contributing to the health of the democratic public sphere in 21st century Australia. But how does this capacity square with Ward’s arguments, quoted above, of the ‘strategic utilisation’ of the medium by politicians, of their ‘exploitation’ of it to gain ‘unfiltered access to voters’? Such a view, of exploitation by elites, suggests that radio, despite its talkback segments, facilitates a ‘top down’ flow of communication; if this is the case, the effect would see a bolstering of existing terms of power, rather than an ‘enhancing [of] the sorts of practices necessary for the making of democratic citizens … [practices that require] the articulation of interests from below as well as above’ (Kane, 1998: 154). This conundrum is surely one of abiding concern to anyone with an interest in talkback radio, and will constitute the focus of this paper.

**Researching Talkback Radio: a Review of the Literature**

In research in this field, the terms ‘talk radio’ and ‘talkback’ are often used interchangeably, although Faine argues for the following distinction: ‘Talk radio involves interviews with guests. Talkback requires the host—with or without a guest—to interact with callers over the phone’ (Faine, 2005a: 173). Faine’s program encompasses both aspects. Ward, on the other hand, uses the term ‘talkback’ in a wider sense: talkback radio, he says, ‘mixes calls from listeners, commentary on public affairs, pre-arranged interviews and newsbreaks …’ (Ward, 2002: 21). For the purposes of this paper, I will use the term ‘talkback radio’ to describe any radio program that includes segments when listeners can ring in to talk to either the host, or to one of the interviewees (such programs will of course include some or many interviews with guests in which callers cannot participate).

The contestation surrounding the very term talkback may reflect the historical lack of research in the area of Australian talk/talkback radio, although in the last few years such research has started to burgeon. Turner et al. (2006: 107) cite the main ‘pioneers’ in this area (a list that includes Adams and Burton, Cook, Pearson and Potts, Mickler, and Ward), but add the rider that ‘for the most part … those
researching talkback radio are still seeking the analysis, data or arguments that might help them to better understand the kind of role it plays both within the mediascape and within the community at large’ (Turner et al., 2006: 108). My own research is an intervention in the second category, because there still does not seem to have been ‘much in the way of academic interest or analysis’ (Turner et al., 2006: 107) in the relationship between talkback and processes that might enhance civic life in the Australian democratic public sphere.

The participation of talkback radio callers, though, and the topics canvassed, form the focus of a paper giving the ‘early results from an ARC-funded project on the content, audience and influence of Australian talkback radio’ by Turner et al. (2006: 107). The findings from that study are beginning to ‘narrow down the kinds of questions we need to ask as we move towards more sophisticated analysis of this media form [given its position as] structurally embedded in the political process’ (Turner et al., 2006: 107).

Until lately, then, the majority of studies into talk radio have been American, although Australian research has nevertheless included significant and groundbreaking work, such as Turner’s 2001 study of the infamous Sydney talkback radio hosts’ (John Laws and Alan Jones) ‘cash for comment’ scandal, an incident that served as a prime example of how ‘political participation [is] restricted by those who [have] access to influencing media content’ (Turner, 2001: 356). Another important Australian study in the same year, by Ward, quoted at the start of this paper, charted both the rise, and the rise in respectability, of talkback radio, and the increasing use being made of it by politicians (Ward, 2001). Whilst Ward’s research would tend to demonstrate the model of the ‘top-down’ flow of communication, as I mentioned earlier, recent studies suggest the actual practice of talkback radio is more complex. As Turner explains, drawing on Tebbutt’s research, this medium has also provided listeners with a significant break from hearing the voices of ‘experts’, and ‘notable people’, and has given voice to women and other marginalised groups (Turner, 2005). As Herbst has shown, talkback programs can ‘provide an excellent, unstructured outlet for public discourse … [and] let callers (those who can get through) express themselves in their own words—sometimes at great length’ (Herbst, 1995: 270).
It would seem, then, that talkback radio provides—at least to some extent, a unique space viable for civic society or public sphere activity (Kane, 1998: 154) in the absence of any such space elsewhere, a point noted by Turner in his suggestion that Australian talkback radio provides opportunities to ‘contest, reconstruct and redefine existing terms and relations of power in the media through direct critical engagement’ (Turner, 2001: 356). A crucial result of such ‘critical engagement’ might well be increased political participation (see Barker, 1998 and 2002; Bennett, 2001; Hofstetter and Gianos, 1997; Hofstetter, 1998; Page and Tannenbaum, 1996; Barker, 1998).

In my current research—in which I closely examine Jon Faine’s Morning Show—while my main focus is not on political participation, I do view Faine’s program as having a great deal to do with ‘politics’ in both the wide and narrow sense of the word. Of course, since the ABC is the public broadcaster, both Faine and his producers need to ensure they do not reveal any political partisanship, or anything that could leave them open to charges of ideological bias (impossible though it is always to avoid such charges); nevertheless, such constraints do ensure that Faine’s program could be described as ‘moderate’ rather than ‘radical’ or ‘conservative’.

Be that as it may, the link between talkback listening and political mobilisation is problematic because increased political participation does not preclude outright misinformation obtained as a result of listening to talkback, as demonstrated by research into levels of misinformation in public affairs knowledge possessed by listeners to talkback radio, revealed in studies by Barker (2002), Bennett (2001), and Hofstetter (1999). Another study, of listeners to both moderate and conservative talkback radio programs, found that although political talk radio ‘has been associated with increased general political participation … and awareness of issues …’ (Hofstetter and Barker, 1999: 353), this effect is not universal: listeners to conservative talk radio were found to be more misinformed (than were other programs’ listeners who were studied) about ideologically charged matters and about political facts. This study also found that:

Somewhat surprisingly, the more one listens to moderate talk, the less misinformed one tends to be regarding these
matters … [although] these findings do not mean that moderate talk radio programming necessarily does a better job than conservative talk programming at providing listeners with accurate information. Those inclined to listen to moderate programming may be more fair-minded than conservative talk listeners, something that the shows themselves cannot control (Hofstetter and Barker, 1999: 353).

Methodology
As I flagged earlier in this paper, there seems to be some inherent tension between, on the one hand, the ‘top down’ flow of information that would appear to feature inescapably in a medium as favoured by the powerful as talkback has proved to be and, on the other hand, the ‘contest of ideas’ model of talkback, as argued by Jon Faine (and presumably by other hosts of programs of similar calibre). In the context of this tension I’m prompted to ask about the kinds of roles might talkback might radio play in the public sphere. This question needs to be followed immediately by another—what type of program do we mean? For talkback is not a singular formation by any means, and if research is to have any sort of analytic usefulness, we need to articulate clear ‘distinctions between iterations of the format’ (Turner et al. 2006: 109).

As I have already mentioned, the specific iteration of talkback I have chosen to examine so far, in the current paper and in its fore-runner (see Lee, 2005), is Jon Faine’s Morning program on ABC Radio 774. My choice of this format was based on three main factors: first, the dire necessity for program-specific analysis in radio research; and second because Faine is an ideal case study due to his self-consciousness about his role, often commenting reflectively on his own talkback processes (albeit usually quite glowingly!), both on-air, and also in other public or semi-public formats, such as university or public lectures, and most recently in his chapter in Robert Manne’s book Do Not Disturb: Is the Media Failing Australia? (2005). The central argument of Faine’s chapter in Manne, foreshadowed by its title ‘Talk Radio and Democracy’, is that ‘while there are sometimes flaws in the way it is conducted, [talk radio] has become an integral part of the democratic debate …’ (Faine, 2005a: 188). While few would
dispute that the dialogic interaction made possible by talkback radio stimulates processes of democratic deliberation that may well enhance civil life and the public sphere, this function will be greatly dependent upon the range of contending viewpoints that are aired.

In order to gain some preliminary sense of the range of viewpoints, for my earlier paper (Lee, 2005), which my current research extends, I conducted a week of observations of the topics aired on Faine’s program, starting on Monday 11 July 2005, and narrowed my focus to a case study of a particularly important topic—euthanasia—first raised by one caller on that day, a terminally ill Victorian man named Steve Guest who rang to make a plea for euthanasia to be legalised. Focussing on this case study, I showed how Guest’s initial phone call ‘was to have a dialogic effect that spread out in ripples across public life in Melbourne for weeks to come’ (Lee, 2005: 41), strongly stimulating processes of deliberation about euthanasia in the wider community. Such deliberative phenomena offer, according to Cottle (2002), the opportunities for ‘democratic deepening’.

I argued at the time, and still do, that while it’s true that all citizens cannot be personally involved in deliberation and dialogue, we can listen to the dialogic exchanges of others, and use these experiences to form our own judgments. But for this to occur, people need not only the rhetorical space of talkback radio, but also the acceptance to raise topics that affect their lives. From the point of view of the listener, it certainly sounds as if Jon Faine’s program provides such acceptance. This, then, was my third reason for choosing his program as my object of study—but I wanted to test my assumption by observing the processes operating on the callers-in, and to discover more about how Faine chooses his topics, interviewees and callers, by specifically asking Faine to explain how he chose topics, interviews, and callers.

Before conducting my observation, in order to add to my specific knowledge of Faine’s recent program content, I assembled a ‘constructed week’ of his program. I did this by recording, over a five-week period in July and August 2005, editions from five different weekdays of the program, broadcast from 8.30 a.m. to noon every weekday on Melbourne Radio Station 774 (that is, I ended up with a set of five Monday to Friday programs, each day taken from different, consecutive week). I intended this to complement my observations...
from September 19 2005 when I sat in Faine's producers’ studio from 8.30 a.m. through to 12 noon, and observed through the large plate-glass panel separating the two studios as Faine conducted his entire program for the morning. My objective here was to observe, record and examine the practices, by Faine and his producers, of structuring the content of the whole program, of dealing with callers, of selecting topics, and of conducting both interviews and the actual talkback discussions.

I followed my morning of observation by interviewing Jon Faine at the conclusion of his program. For my questions I drew on, and often problematised, assertions Faine had made in his chapter in Robert Manne's book (Manne, 2005), as well as on air during many of his shows.

**Research Questions**

In light of the whole discussion so far, my research questions are as follows:

1. What kinds of roles might certain iterations of talkback radio (in this case *Jon Faine's Morning Program*) play in the public sphere?
2. To what extent does Faine’s program provide a forum for listeners to raise for discussion topics that affect their lives?
3. How does Faine choose his topics, interviewees and callers?

**Analysis/Discussion**

*‘Giving you the chance to be heard’ (unless you’re at the end of the queue)*

There's little doubt that Jon Faine and his producers fit a prodigious amount of content into each three-and-a-half hour program: the main topical issues that Faine, with the assistance of his producers, has chosen, and the talkback segment that follows this; the frequent traffic reports, hourly news, weather and sports reports; stock exchange reports; news from the local papers with an editor from Leader (local) newspapers; the special weekly talkback sections such as the Talkback Lawyer, who answers callers’ legal questions; the Open Line (a second talkback segment); and the Conversation Hour that includes a co-host and one or more guests or interviewees.
On my day of observation, September 19 2005, Faine started the program with the main feature—his own overview of the just-released book *The Latham Diaries*, by recently resigned former opposition leader Mark Latham, a book that Faine said ‘dished the dirt’ on the political process. Although Faine always sounds as if he’s talking ‘off the cuff’, for much of his commentary he reads from typed sheets (although I only saw this on my one day in the studio, it was corroborated by his producers). As a counterpoint, I assume, to the negative commentary that the Latham book had received, from then Prime Minister John Howard and then Leader of the Opposition Kim Beazley downwards, the next segment of the program featured a phone interview with Leandra Wilton, the sister of the late MP Greg Wilton, who had committed suicide five years earlier. Ms Wilton stated that Latham’s criticisms of Kim Beazley (in his book) for not contacting or supporting her brother in the lead-up to his suicide were true. It was Latham, she claimed, who had offered support to her late brother and afterwards to her family.

The inclusion of this call highlights a number of issues: Ms Wilton, a person with close connection to the political ‘elite’, if not a member herself, rang and offered the phone interview, according to the producers. Because she was quite explicitly criticising Beazley, one of Faine’s two producers called Beazley’s office to give him right of reply: ‘I’ve got Beazley’s office on [line] 1360 …’ Beazley did not, however, on this occasion respond to the invitation, at least not during this program. One person who did respond, after hearing the Wilton call, was a psychiatrist, who then rang to talk to Faine about suicide. This is not a segment of the program that generally includes ‘talkback’, but the producers agreed to let this caller through (a move approved by Faine), and put him on hold until the Wilton interview finished, at which time the psychiatrist gave a professional view of the factors leading to suicide in general. These first two callers, Wilton and the psychiatrist, could be termed ‘talkback’ callers, since both were responding to material Faine was presenting; yet at the same time they are each, to a certain extent, ‘experts’. Despite the valid contributions to the topic by each of these callers, then, the rhetorical space thus far constructed on this particular morning could not really be described as providing ‘the unstructured outlet for public discourse’ that Herbst (1995: 270) argues talkback programs are capable of doing.
The second major feature on Faine’s program of September 19 was a state issue—the contentious tolls on freeways—about which Andrew McIntosh, Shadow Attorney General was interviewed by phone. When McIntosh broke into any sort of opaque ‘weasel’ talk (Watson, 2003), such as ‘We’re striving for flexible responses …’, Faine stopped him with, ‘I’m sorry, I didn’t understand a word of that. Could you please explain what it means?’ I’ve heard Faine do this on many occasions to members of elite groups, whether from parliament or from business, and I would argue that it’s a strategy for demystifying some of the language of elites, something that might be a useful strategy to ‘help citizens obtain information to make reasoned political judgments’ (Bennett, 2001: 72), a function of talk radio, according to Bennett.

After the first of the regular ‘traffic reports’, Faine reminded listeners of the phone number for talkback callers (1300 222 774) for the first talkback segment—on the topics he had just covered—as well as reiterating the current promotional line: ‘Giving you the chance to be heard.’ And indeed, callers are first heard by one of the two producers, who always offer to ring the caller straight back if they are calling from a mobile, an equitable practice, since it removes from the caller the financial burden of ‘holding on’ for a length of time.

The producers then ask the callers what they have rung to talk about, and they then put the callers on hold, record their topics and link them to a specific telephone line. The calls are then put through to Faine in a certain order, probably of interest (in the producers’ views), judging by the dialogue I heard between the two producers, of which the following is a sample:

‘We’ll take no. 6 first; she’s excellent.’

‘Tony from Eildon is on Line 1. He thinks Latham’s book is a wake-up call.’

‘Lines 3 and 5 are pretty strong, and line 2 is funny.’

Although I did not hear the producers refuse to let any callers go on to talk to Faine, sometimes a caller who had been placed towards the back of the queue (possibly due to how ‘interesting’ their call was
thought to be) was dropped off, if Faine ran out of time in that particular talkback segment (for example, producer to caller: 'Geraldine, I'm sorry, but we're not going to get to your call'). This happened several times during my morning's observation. Another type of culling occurs when Faine himself cuts off a call, possibly in case it might result in legal action, or is likely to be too unsubstantiated to be credible, or perhaps because he gets a whiff of a personal vendetta by the caller against someone. For example, one caller, named 'Miles', said he had some 'off the record' information from a politician. Faine refused to take this call.

Although Faine had said, during a July edition of his program, that he was just a 'cipher', when I asked during my interview of him if he really believed this, he qualified it with: 'No, we're more like filters. We look at everything that's going on, assess it, get as much as possible out in the open, into the 'marketplace of ideas', so that it can be discussed. But we do make choices and decisions. We have to. Not absolutely everything can be aired.' (Faine, 2005b) The concept of the 'marketplace of ideas', has been problematised, of course—for example Hofstetter et al. (1999: 366) suggest this marketplace now 'functions more like a “supermarket of ideas”, where ideas compete not so much on the basis of merit’ but rather on their packaging or presentation. It would surely be impossible for this not to be a factor, I argue, given ‘the enormous numbers of press releases' (Faine, 2005b) Faine receives daily, and from which only one or two can be chosen: ‘The fax machine is going constantly with them coming in. We use maybe one or two to generate interviews' (Faine, 2005b).

A further process that impacts upon selection of callers is where Faine finishes discussing a certain topic with callers, and then moves on to a second topic. If a caller rings in to talk about the first, the producers tell them, ‘We're not taking any more calls on that at the moment, but you can ring back in an hour [for the Open Line] if you like.’ The Open Line, which runs from 10.45 to 11.00 a.m., is the fifteen-minute talkback session to which callers are invited to phone in on any issue of concern. The issues raised can range enormously (see Lee, 2005), and have been dubbed parochial and banal by some commentators (see for example, Alcorn, 2005), although as I have shown (Lee, 2005), they can range from council rulings on the lengths of dog-leads through to calls for the legalisation of euthanasia.
The number of callers that can be included in The Open Line (based on my total of five recordings and my one observation) also ranges from about four through to six or eight, depending on how long each conversation takes. There are at least two significant functions of these Open Line calls. The first is that they are often able to generate topics that Faine might raise on future programs (for more on this, see Lee, 2005). During my observation, this was certainly in evidence—for example, one caller rang in to complain about telemarketing, including the type practised by Australian companies now employing people to call from offshore. I then heard one of the producers say to the other: ‘Why don’t we find out the companies involved and find out who’s managing this?’

The second function is that when Faine hears something that he decides sounds like unjust treatment, he will direct the caller back to the producers to take details, and will promise to ‘ask questions for you’. The example of this that occurred during my observation was when a man called in to say he had been working in Thailand for the Defence Department for 17 years, and had a Thai wife and daughter; he’d now been sent back to Australia, but his wife and daughter were not allowed in. Both of these functions demonstrate a certain amount of ceding of editorial control (despite the ordering by the producers as calls come in), as do the diverse nature of the calls themselves, a format that Cottle (2002) has shown to offer opportunities for democratic deepening.

Conclusion
There is no doubt that this format does offer opportunities for democratic processes, although to a limited extent. The wide range and large amount of other content needed to sustain a program of this length, and for such a wide audience, means that only about half an hour of actual talkback can be fitted in each day.

Elite callers would seem to be able to garner more ready access to Faine, supporting the ‘supermarket’ rather than ‘marketplace’ of ideas concept, where packaging is an important factor. A certain amount of ‘top down’ flow of information, is unavoidable, then, especially when the ‘elite callers’ factor is coupled with the many politicians who are interviewed. However, whilst Faine is certainly not, in his own words ‘an expert on government policy’ (Faine, 2005b),
he nevertheless often does contest the words of elites. Indeed, in my interview with him, he outlined another strategy he uses: ‘What we're likely to do, if we're interviewing a minister, say, is [to] wave a press release from the opposition or someone, and say, “Well, X says this about what you’re doing, what do you say to that?”’ (Faine, 2005b). Faine has problematised the preference of politicians for the talk radio medium, arguing that

out of respect for and deference to the skills of the specialists [political journalists], surely it would be in the public interest—and would make for a more open and accountable form of politics—if the political leaders of the nation opened themselves up more regularly to chats with those who cover that patch more exclusively. After all, as well as dealing with the prime minister and federal politics, I do take calls on pet care with the talkback vet on the same morning. (Faine, 2005a: 183)

But of course, ‘it is a rare radio host who says “no” to the early morning call from the prime minister’s press secretary offering the nation’s leader willing to talk over the issues of the day’ (Faine, 2005a: 172). Still, despite this preference for radio by John Howard and many other politicians, my data suggest that Faine does ask questions that lend weight to his claim of the ‘contest of ideas’ function of talk radio (2005a: 171). In my view, this means that programs such as Faine’s, and similar iterations, do to a certain extent mitigate what Ward sees as politicians’ exploitation of talkback programs ‘to gain unfiltered access to voters’ Ward (2002: 24).

So whilst the rhetorical space provided by Faine’s program, and by kindred iterations, is not completely unfiltered, neither is it unstructured (because of the moderation by his producers and by Faine). There are ostensibly reasons for this: an unstructured free-for-all could easily end up as an unsatisfying experience for listeners, destroying the very rhetorical space it seeks to create. As it stands, Faine’s program certainly would certainly seem to many listeners, I argue, to be offering acceptance of ‘ordinary’ callers’ views, thereby providing at least the potential opportunity for listeners to feel they can ‘exercise their democratic rights’ (Turner et al., 2006: 109); even
though only a small percentage ever do call up, with only a dozen or fewer actually having ‘their say’ on any one day. Nevertheless, the evidence from my detailed observation of this iteration of talkback (supported by the patterns apparent in the five recorded programs from the previous two months), suggest that it would appear to offer significant processes that enhance civic life in the Australian democratic public sphere, although there is of course potential for further enhancement. I’m aware, however, that the views of actual listeners are tantalisingly absent from this study, an area that could form a fruitful focus for further research into this particular iteration of talkback radio.

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——interviewed by Carolyne Lee, 19 September 2005 at the ABC Studios, Southbank, Melbourne, 2005.
## Appendix 14: Sample Tax Invoice

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Thank you
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**Online Resources**

Bartleby.com, www.bartleby.com


Journalist Express, www.journalistexpress.com

Journalistic Resources Page, www.markovits.com/journalism

Journoz.com, www.journoz.com


Our Writing Lab at Purdue University, http://owl.english.purdue.edu


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