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Mar17

[Mike](#)

[Writing vs. blogging: Why they're not the same thing](#)

In my [previous post](#), I raised the issue of blog and blogger credibility. So, you decide if you feel I'm qualified to post public relations tips here.

My background:

I have more than 20 years of professional experience in the media and public relations. Before 'switching sides' for good, I worked in radio for 18 years, and I was a regional reporter for *The Buffalo News*.

Prior to joining RIT in 1999, I was a public relations specialist with Monroe Community Hospital in Rochester.

I've been at RIT for six-and-a-half years—the last two as associate director of University News Services. In addition to covering specific “beats,” I also produce [Dateline: RIT](#) and, as deputy managing editor of [News & Events](#), I'm intimately involved in the biweekly production of RIT's “official” newspaper (with my trusted colleague, managing editor Vienna Carvalho-McGrain). In addition to other responsibilities, I read every comma, period, dotted ‘i’ and crossed ‘t’ in each issue (and I serve as the unofficial AP style guru). On the side, I cover radio for my column, “On the Radio,” in [Business Strategies Magazine](#), and last fall I taught an RIT undergraduate course in [Public Relations Writing](#). And I've somehow managed to find time for [graduate studies](#) (final course just completed—4.0 GPA intact :~) Next up: my master's thesis.

If you're satisfied, continue reading for more on what to expect from my PR tips.

Every couple weeks or so, I'll post a new tip. I'll usually write shorter, I promise. But because I love to write, you will *never, ever* read a first draft here (unlike on many blogs). Now I'm keenly aware that to many bloggers, blogging means: simple thoughts (or, oftentimes, simplistic ones—and there is a subtle difference, by the way). But simple (or simplistic) thoughts are often akin to the aforementioned “streams of consciousness.” Or brain dump. Some may say that's “writing.” It's not.

For that reason I don't feel it's at all odd that I have not heretofore embraced blogging. You see, I'm a writer. Like many writers, I love words and writing *more so* than do most bloggers. In fact, I've been writing for as long as I can remember (including, from around the age of 10, writing—and recording into a portable cassette recorder—radio “newscasts”). And I have *passion* for writing and for *reading good writing* (which, regrettably, is lacking on many blogs).

These qualities of a good writer—passion for both reading and writing—will sound familiar to my PR Writing students because they are among the many attributes of a good writer stressed in my class. So, consider this PR tip #2:

The more you write, the better a writer you will become.

The more you read *good* writing, the better a writer you will become.

My students also learned “the writing process”: Think — Write — Edit — Rewrite. (Note that no place in the writing process do you find: “Post first draft of the first thoughts that enter your mind.”)

Of today's instantaneous communications, Bob Schieffer, host of “[Face the Nation](#)” on CBS, recently asked, “Is our new ability to communicate with almost everyone and to do it instantly causing us to lose our ability to reflect, to think before we speak?”

That's a fair question. My response (and promise to you for this space): I'll strive always to offer *high-quality, thoughtful, reflective* writing, composed with passion. It's my hope you will consider my words worthwhile. But, either way, they're worth the price you paid to read them.

[Next time](#): More about the first rule of public relations: Know your target audience.

1. [Silandara Bartl](#)

Mar19

You can blog without writing and re-writing and still be a good writer, Mike. Blogging doesn't mean you write the first thoughts that come into your head, or that you haven't thought out what you're going to say beforehand. I often pre-compose (if you will) posts (and press releases for that matter) in my head before the words hit the page. And I rarely edit extensively. That's just how I write and I don't think it makes me a bad writer because of it, or any less thoughtful or well thought out than someone who takes a really long time to finish what they're saying. (Not a dig on you or anyone in particular.) Still glad to see you blogging, though, however you get there. :)

2. [Mike Saffran](#)

Mar19

Unfortunately (for readers), blogging *does* mean writing the first thoughts that come to *some* bloggers' minds. And the “writing process” (think - write - edit - rewrite) to which I referred is not something I dreamt up. It's Journalism 101. (Or, Public Relations Writing 0535-464-01, if you will :-) OK, so strictly speaking this isn't “journalism.” But we're higher-education professionals (and

journalists) writing on the Web. I'm merely suggesting that we aim higher than some blogs. (After all, I see first proofs of *News & Events*, and they're often not pretty sights. No jab at anyone in particular.) By the way, time for this post: About five minutes (including thinking, writing, editing and rewriting).

3. [Karen Black](#)

Mar20

I continue to be a blog skeptic, and agree whole heartedly with you, Mike, that without a clear purpose or a specific audience, any writing---I'm not just blog bashing here---becomes rambling, and of little value. Your tips are good, and I hope many use them. I suspect that, like any new fad or trend, most all of the blogs/ramblers will go by the wayside and there will be but a few good blogs left standing. I hope it's sooner rather than later.

4. [Justin Thorp](#)

Mar20

I agree more with Silandra. I absolutely "think - write - edit - rewrite" when writing my blog but the process isn't as formal as if I were writing an article. I am not writing an article. I am having a conversation. I think this is a new paradigm. I am not saying that we should move away from the high qualities of writing. Its just different. One thing that I see too often is that the web gets painted with the same brush as we do newspapers and other print media. I think that when that happens it doesn't acknowledge what the web really is. I think those ramblers which Karen refers to are people that are trying to have a conversation. I am sure that I ramble plenty on my blog but BIG companies are listening to my ramblings on matters that effect them. We are having a conversation and both coming out better. They are getting a customer and I am getting a better product. On a different note....we should have a Rochester Bloggers Meetup or something. That way we can all meet eachother and have conversations in physical space not just web space.

5. [Wes Thorp](#)

Mar21

Mike--I really appreciate where you are with blogging. And, I appreciate you background in news and in public relations. I've been there. I graduated from the Michigan State University School of Journalism in 1969. I viewed reporting as a holy calling. I worked for a variety of newspapers from the Chicago Tribune to a chain of small papers here in Michigan. I had copy editors who molded me into a journyman writer and reporter. I could have been talked into burning my Draft Card, but my membership card in the Society of Professional Journalists was untouchable. It was always held in a prominent spot in my wallet. For more than 12 years I was manager of the State Capital Newsroom in Michigan. I handled thousands of news releases. Then, I started writing them. Many achieved their intended result in getting media play and attention. As time went on, their effect diminished. Mediarresponse became tepid regardless of how well they were written. Polical caucus PR types pushed me as a legislative chief-of-staff to use more news releases. I knew they had the same effect as masturbation. Makes you feel good for a few seconds, but didn't go beyond that. My opinion, it's all about getting your message out and achieving the intended result. Communication. That's it. Consumers want authenticity, not press release speak. They want to be part of the conversation. They want to be listened to purse and simple. I would encourage you to read more blogs. Talk to your students at RIT. Talk to Justin who left a comment on this post. He has a great blog. He's also my son. RIT is great. You guys are cutting-edge in so many things. But changas still hard. I recognize that.

6. [Mike Saffran](#)

Mar21

Excellent points all, Wes. I particularly appreciate your remark about your membership card in the Society of Professional Journalists. This April Fool's Day (an easy date to remember) will mark six years since I packed up my headphones and walked away from my radio show, "The Jukebox"--but I still have my "FCC Restricted Radiotelephone Operator Permit" (hey, you never know when it might be needed again). I still have my headphones, too, of course--just never ask me if you can borrow them (as an old studio saying goes, "I'd sooner lend you my toothbrush" :-)) Just to clarify--for all readers--my position on blogs and writing: I'm truly not anti-blogging, and I'm in no way opposed to an informal, conversational style of writing. I'm *in favor of good writing*. Plain and simple. In fact, a "disciplined conversational"

style was one that I introduced to my PR Writing students. Writers can, indeed, write informally and well. My students and I also discussed an article, "Hooked on e-mail, but not on grammar," about slipping writing standards (and indifference among some students)--not on blogs but in e-mail and instant messaging. It was a great discussion. One argument proposes that the mere fact that a generation is *writing more* as a result of e-mail and IMs (and we can add blogs) is a good thing. It's a valid argument. However, we finished our discussion on this note: In the article, a student at the University of Louisiana at Monroe was quoted as saying, "[Future bosses] are not going check semicolons, commas and stuff like that." *Oh yes they will*, I assured them. Keep in mind, my class was filled with aspiring public relations writers. *One might* get away with shoddy punctuation in other disciplines--but not PR writing. How do I know? Because we're currently interviewing to fill a writer's position in RIT's news office, and I'm among those (along with Bob and Paul) reviewing cover letters, rÃ©sumÃ©s and writing samples. So, trust me: *grammar counts*. Yours, Wes, is an excellent, nicely written post. Thanks for joining the conversation.

7. [Justin Thorp](#)

Mar23

I'm in no way opposed to an informal, conversational style of writing. I'm in favor of good writing. Plain and simple. In fact, a "disciplined conversational" style was one that I introduced to my PR Writing students.

That sounds like blogging. So you're acknowledging that blogging is writing? Blogging is a revolution. I think within the 5 years it will be as necessary for a company to have a blog as it is for them today to have a web site.

8. [Mike Saffran](#)

Mar23

Not if it's "brain dump" . . . or rambling. The "disciplined conversational" style is neither (and is, in fact, also used in many well-written news stories). Since you and your dad are both good writers (who also happen to be bloggers), I would think you, too, would tend to frown upon poorly written blogs (for instance, those with poor grammar, punctuation and spelling--a.k.a. "brain dump") that give bloggers a bad name. I agree, blogs may very well be part of a revolution--possibly in ways we have yet to fathom--with far greater potential beyond serving as an online diary. Here's a favorite quote of mine, from anthropologist Edmund Carpenter, asking about printing technology: "What can print do better than any other medium and is that worth doing?" Modifying it by inserting "radio" for "print," I've used the quote often in my critiques of the current state of radio. Let's try it with blogs: "What can blogs do better than any other medium and is that worth doing?" Definitely *not* my answer: Be an online diary.

9. [The Tiger Beat](#)

Mar29

Another analogy: Artwork vs. doodles? You may have seen my guest essay, in which I did some flogging on blogging and wrogging, in the op-ed section of the Democrat and Chronicle on March 27. If you've been following the discussion here the past couple weeks--particularly...

10. [The Tiger Beat](#)

Jun05

Why this is my first *Tiger Beat* blog post This, dear faceless blog readers, is my first original (non-follow-up comment) post. My first post here--to this year-old Weblog--and my first post to any blg, anywhere. You see, I'm what you could call a blog skeptic. I hasten to add,...

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