

Writing Strong Articles Xochitl E. Dixon

In 2011, I enjoyed a conversation with agent Steve Laube during the Mount Hermon Christian Writers Conference. His wise counsel changed my perspective of how God uses writing as a tool for ministry. I didn't have to write a book for God to start using the words He'd given me to writer.

The following year, I took my first class on article writing and began to practice my nonfiction writing skills. I learned how to construct and repurpose a strong article and have since experienced the joy of seeing God using my articles to minister to readers.

Article writing is an ongoing learning process through which writers can discover and strengthen their voices. As we hone our craft, we can embrace the privilege of serving through the ministry of magazine writing and allowing the Lord to use our small offerings.

To write strong articles for Christian magazines, it's important to continue deepening our personal relationships with God first and foremost. Though our goal is to pursue God, not publication, we can write strong article when we:

1. Know our specific target audience.
2. Decide on one universal need we'll be addressing through our article.
3. Narrow down that one topic, as we choose our angle.
4. Identify our takeaway, the main message readers will gain from reading our article.
 - A. It's vital to create a title and first paragraph that clearly point to this promise.
5. Decide on our purpose and format for the article.
 - A. Will the article will be a specific how-to list or an encouraging message that motivates readers toward a call to respond?
6. Research, carefully recording our sources and properly citing them within the article.
7. Plan our reader's journey. Outlines can help avoid straying off topic.
 - A. Will we begin with a personal illustration?
 - B. Will we be offering a list of tips that readers can apply immediately or work toward?
 - C. How will every paragraph, every sentence, walk our readers to the end we desire?
8. Review writer's guidelines if we're planning to submit our article to a magazine or blog.

A. It's important to print guidelines and review them before writing our first draft, before editing each draft, and after completing our final draft.

9. Write our first draft without worrying about edits.

10. Edit our rough draft, asking ourselves the following questions:

- A. Does the first paragraph clearly state the article's promise/topic?
- B. Does every paragraph/sentence move the reader closer to the article's promise?
- C. Does every paragraph/sentence stay on topic?
- D. Does every paragraph/sentence add to the value of the article?
- E. Does every paragraph have a main point that builds on the promise?
- F. Does every paragraph's main point bring the reader closer to the end promise?
- G. Does your last paragraph satisfy readers by adding value or offering a call to respond?

11. Edit our draft, intentionally cutting all unnecessary words and sentences.

12. Identify redundant points or statements. Choose the best and cut the rest.

13. Use active verbs, specific details, varying sentence structure, and sensory details.

14. Avoid the use of bold face, italics, and exclamation points to bring attention to a sentence.

15. Edit as we read the entire article out loud, noting and adjusting the pace of the article.

A. Using varied sentence structures helps set the tone and the pace of the article.

16. Correct spelling and grammatical errors, and ensure consistency with verb tense.

17. Look for overuse of fragments, repeated words or phrases, and run-on sentences.

18. Ensure our article is at or under the established word count.

19. Complete a final read-through.

20. Invite other writers to offer honest feedback and constructive criticism.

A. Make sure critique partners know the writer's guidelines.

21. Acknowledge each critique comment and choose one of the following:

- A. I accept this opinion, but choose to leave this section alone.
- B. I accept this opinion and will change it according to the suggestions.
- C. I accept this opinion and will come up with a change that better suits my voice.

22. Read the article out loud one more time, editing as needed.

23. Share the article, praying for the readers God entrusts to you.

24. If you submitted the article to a magazine or blog, pray for the editor and potential readers as you wait for a response and start your next article.

25. Repeat this process.

Thank you for taking time to visit my blog and for using your God-given voice for the glory of our Lord Jesus Christ. As an important member of the Body of Christ, your voice is needed.

I would love to hear how these tips have helped you, as you continue to hone your craft and serve through the ministry of article writing.

To read my two-part article, “The Ministry of Magazine Writing,” which includes my interview with Steve Laube, please visit the Inspire Christian Writers blog at:

<http://www.inspirewriters.com/the-ministry-of-magazine-writing-part-1/>

<http://www.inspirewriters.com/the-ministry-of-magazine-writing-part-2/>