# **WRITE TIGHT**

Don't Waste the Viewer's Time | Use Natural Sound | Explain the Video

#### **Use Active Verbs**

Try to avoid "to be" verbs including "am, is, are, was, were, be, being, been." Instead explain what did what. Consider the difference between:

The boy was found.

Police found the boy.

Mistakes were made.

The Pentagon admitted that it made mistakes.

This is not an iron-clad rule, but it usually results in more precise writing.

### **Avoid Subjective** Adjectives

Fantastic, gut-wrenching, mother's worse nightmare and tragic are subjective adjectives. Let the subject of the story use them but you should use objective and factual adjectives. If the story is good enough, you don't need to inflate the language. You can almost always avoid adverbs including sadly, happily, hopefully and luckily.



## **Explain the Video**

Don't tell the viewer what they are seeing in the video, explain what they are not seeing. If you are showing me a dog, there is no need to say the word "dog." Tell me the dog's name, that he saved somebody's life last night, that he is a hunting dog but is afraid of rabbits. Enrich my understanding. Certainly don't <u>compete</u> with the image by talking about something completely unrelated to it. With the eye and ear compete, the eye wins.



#### How to Narrate Like Morgan Freeman

The magic of Morgan Freeman's narration is rooted in his sentence structure. Read these lines from a Visa commercial:

- Hours before his race in 1988, Dan Jansen's sister Jane passed away.
- He'd promised her he would win gold. **He didn't.**
- Until six years later, then he skated a victory lap with his daughter, Jane.

Think how different it would be if he had read these lines instead:

Dan Jansen's sister Jane passed away before his race in 1988.

He didn't win gold, even though he promised her he would.

He skated a victory lap with his daughter Jane six years later.

The words in **bold** are power words and they always come at the end. When you use power words at the end of sentences they hang in the ear and become memorable. It works for Morgan Freeman and it will work for you.

#### **Great Natural Sound Isn't Just Decoration**

Close up natural sound places the viewer close to the story. The "tromp-tromp" of a funeral procession not only tells the viewer about the size of the honor guard and how many horses went by, but the sounds imply respect the crowd is showing by remaining silent. A brisk winter wind sound tells me what I need to know about how cold it is. Sound "takes me there." Natural sound is almost always close-up sound, so get that microphone closer and listen to the audio while you are recording it. Too many audio edits can interrupt the story. Edit for the living room, not the newsroom.

#### **The Setting Matters**

Where will your subject be the most authentic "them?" Don't settle for a conference room or behind a desk interview. Take the interview to the scene of the scene of the story if you can. Talk to the factory manager on the production floor, while he is working. Listen to the doctor while she looks through a microscope. Talk to the farmer on his tractor or the athlete while she is working out. The setting influences what the subject feels and says.

#### **Subjective Soundbites - Objective Copy**

The best soundbites are thoughts, opinions, feelings and emotions. That allows the journalist to tell the facts of the story. When the reporter starts stealing the emotion of the story, the character comes off as flat and not at all memorable.

**Bad Reporter:** The boy said the storm scared him. Boy: The wind blew the roof off while I was inside.

**Good Reporter:** The wind ripped the roof off this house. Six-year-old Jack was inside, alone.

Boy: I screamed for my mommy.

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