



The following exercises are a foundation for your tight writing practice. Don't read them—DO them.

8 Specific, Actionable Exercises to Make Your Writing Better—No Matter What Level Writer You Are

You have read 10,000 times about writing tight. But have you received any clear, actionable guidance on determining what that means and how to implement it? Start here.

Choose an activity (or any number of them; the more, the better). Don't read them and think, *I know all that*. I promise that until you diligently do the exercises, you do *not* know all that.

Instructions:

Look up any terms you don't feel 100% clear about. Work with pen and paper, as this engages both your brain *and* body, creating something akin to muscle memory. When finished, you'll own the concepts—they will become part of your process.

1. Write a paragraph on how to do something without using any **helping verbs**. Then you'll remember what helping verbs are and how they weaken your writing voice.
2. Write a paragraph without using **action verbs**. This is reverse psychology. Strong, tight writing depends more on active verbs than passive. You need to own the difference.
3. Make a list of **10 verbs** and give each an **adverb**. Adverbs are often lame. This exercise helps you see why powerful verbs and solid context eliminate dependence on sprinkling adverbs willy-nilly.

4. Make a list of **10 adverbs**—give each a **verb**. Same idea as the previous exercise, making you intuit the problem from both directions. Consider the difference between *She violently and loudly slammed the door* and *Bang! Her parting comment*.
5. Make a list of **30 compound nouns** formatted correctly as a compound word or hyphenated word. Almost every writer needs to look these up as they use them. It isn't arbitrary; spelling is spelling.
6. Describe how to start a car without using **prepositions**. Prepositions and prep phrases are major bloats that are not easy to correct. This exercise prompts you to pause and consider word choices. You need prepositions, but not nearly as many as you use.
7. Write a persuasive paragraph without **conjunctions**. You might have to look up a list of conjunctions to add additional words to your toolbox. The goal is to stop hanging thoughts together with conjunctions. Rhythm is a key indicator of good writing—sentence structure needs color and variety.
1. Make a list of filler words you use and tape it to your computer. Filler words weaken your writing and bore your reader like

Just

Really

Very

So

A little bit

A bit

Kind of

Sort of

That

In order to

Due to the fact that

The fact that

Actually

Basically

Essentially

Fundamentally

Perhaps
Maybe
Pretty (as an intensifier)
Quite
For all intents and purposes
At the end of the day
In my opinion
I think that
It is
There is
There are

And the all-time most misused filler word, *THAT*! [To understand the problem, read *Walden University's Guide to That*.](#)

NOTE: I'm not saying never use these words. I'm saying understand them, know how they harm your prose, and own them when you use them.

Keep your results and do the exercises again in a few weeks to see how you've shifted your habits. Writing tight means using the fewest words possible to convey your compelling message effectively. Without exception, when I finish a piece, I edit out 25% of the words. I did it with this story.

Go thou, and write tight.