

TEWS

The Espoletta Writing System

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Foreword By Florence KHA

Two decades of work experience in the corporate sector (banking, investment holding, manufacturing, property development and manpower) has springboarded me into the world of entrepreneurship. From 2005, I founded two online platforms: market research services and biz-buy-sell directory.

My acquaintance with Wei Ming dated way back to 2005. He was a member, a respondent in my market research platform. I knew him as a professional photographer then. It was during one of our meet-up sessions in March 2019, that he shared his vision and concept for an online lifestyle journal. It was a go-ahead on the spot for me.

To date we've conceptualised and humanised Espoletta just like how Wei Ming envisioned it to be from day one. We've developed and established a series of writing techniques for writers. And published more than two hundred articles curated by over forty writers from diverse and colourful backgrounds. Not only are we helping budding and seasoned in-house writers to sharpen their literary skills, we are opening up their minds to all possibilities in journalism, too.

This book is thoughtfully carved for all writers and their subjects. The Espoletta Writing System guides you how to write effectively and tell meaningful stories that global audience would love to consume. You'll also learn how brand identity works for all the parties in every story.

I am truly honoured to be given the opportunity to pen my thoughts here. Wei Ming is not only a co-founder, but also a good friend. A Jack-Of-All-Trades, he is also a Master-Of-Many. I don't call him the "Simon Cowell" of journalism for nothing. I've seen his tenacity and commitment in grooming every single writer. It might seem effortless to many, but I do know that he's paddling like crazy just like a duck on water. And that rightly befits a maestro, who knows his trade well and is willing to share his trade with the world through this book.

Florence KHA
Editor-In-Chief, Espoletta
Kuala Lumpur, 2021

Preface

Ever since starting Espoletta¹ in 2019, we've been flooded with questions if we'd ever consider to teach our writing techniques. Honestly, it had never crossed our minds at all. We're already hard pressed just to keep our in-house writers up to par. And we're always recruiting new writers, so the process never really slowed down.

Now that things have finally settled down a little, I thought that it's about time that we finally give this a go. So here it is, The Espoletta Writing System. This book consists of the original writing system, plus some of the newly refined techniques that we learnt along the way.

My appreciation to Espoletta Co-Founder, Florence KHA, for helping me to edit this book.

¹ <https://espoletta.com>

Prologue

We all read regularly. From newspapers, magazines and books, to e-books, gossip columns and social media posts on our phones or tablets. Yet somehow, we get this inkling that some passages are easier to read than others. You just can't seem to put a finger to it.

And then there are also the others whose writings simply don't flow very easily. Even if you force yourself to read them all, your brain seems to protest all the way. In fact, at times you find it almost impossible to continue reading at all. It's easier to simply put that reading material away, or move on to the next read.

But why is that so? Do some writers simply write better than the others? Or have they mastered some kind of special writing skills that make their passages easier to read? Isn't writing all the same?

More importantly, which category do *you* belong to? Is your writing just as easy to read for your intended audience? Or do you, unfortunately, also fall into the latter category? Have you ever really given it much thought before?

In all actuality, writing is more art than it is science. You can apply all the writing techniques you've learnt in school. And yet it doesn't necessarily make your writings any easier to read. There's this certain finesse in writing that

makes some writers stand head and shoulders above all the other writers.

Just like in art, anybody can paint. But it takes an artist to be able to breathe life into a painting. It's just not easy to identify nor quantify the type of "skill" needed.

The good news is that this writing skill is something that anybody can learn. The only limitation is whether you want to learn or not.

Anybody can be a painter, but only a selected few can be an artist. Likewise, anybody can write, but only a selected few can truly master the skill of writing. The question is, do you have what it takes to be one?...

ACT ONE

**Establishing A Solid
Foundation For
Your Writing Journey**

1. Reading And Writing Skills

We all learnt language skills in school. It's the prerequisite in order to be able to learn other subjects. For without language, you wouldn't be able to communicate with others. And two of the fundamental language skills are reading and writing. So by common sense deduction, anybody who's had at least some basic schooling can read and write. But the question is this, can you write in a way that easily conveys your message across? Can you do it in a way that's exciting, and attract others' attention? Can your audience easily understand your message?

1.1 The Schooling Years

For the sake of simplicity, we shall limit this discussion to only English language. It's more or less the same for other languages, but let's not fly before we can crawl, shall we?

Primary education taught us how to read simple passages, and even how to compose simple passages too. Secondary school taught us to read real life passages, like the news and current issues. In the midst of adapting to the physical changes of our bodies, we also learnt how to write real life applicable passages too. Such as composition of essays, reports, application letters, even job applications. These writing skills will become useful once we graduate to the working world.

Tertiary education split our academic pursuit even further into specialised fields. We learnt how to write based on a narrow academic interpretation. If you don't make any grammatical errors, and meet all the requirements in the marking scheme, you're good go to. If you don't, well, you're just not good enough.

1.2 Did Our Education System Fail Us?

Does the academic system actually teach students how to write in a way that's attractive to the audience? To the people who have no idea exactly how your story ends before actually reading it? Or is it simply to meet all the points as listed on the marking scheme?

To their defence, no, they didn't teach students the wrong things. Schools teach students how to write, and write them correctly. But if you're interested in *creative* writing, that's a whole different ballgame altogether. Not unless you end up taking advertising, journalism, mass communications, or something similar. And even then, there's no guarantee of you learning all the juicy creative writing stuff.

If that's what you're interested to learn, then you'll have to look beyond the standard education system. You've gotta seek specialised training. Training not from an academic school, but from the school of hard knocks. These are skills you learn on the job, preferably under the guidance

of a mentor. There's no such thing as a standard syllabus to lend structure to one's specialised training.

1.3 Do You Need Specialised Training?

Well, you don't *technically* need specialised training. You can knock your head on a couple of walls as you embark on your self-taught journey. After all, making mistakes is one of the fundamental steps to learning in the first place, isn't it? And they don't call it the "school of hard knocks" for no reason.

But life's too short to be learning from your own mistakes. If you're smart enough, you'll learn from somebody else's mistakes instead.

2. You Can Read And Write Too

There's this misconception imprinted into many of our minds. That if we already know how to read, then by extension, we'll also know how to write. Henceforth, even primary school children also know how to write too... Except, knowing how to "write" is one thing, but knowing how to "write" effectively is another thing altogether.

2.1 The Physical Act Of Writing

Most people interpret "writing" as merely stringing words together to form meaningful sentences. It doesn't matter whether electronically with a keyboard, or actually laying down ink on paper with a pen.

Scribbling down a short message on a note pad, or even composing work-related emails are all considered as "writing". Heck, even listing down your grocery items for your next grocery run is also considered writing too.

Writing helps you to connect the dots, to link ideas, one to one another. Additionally, writing also helps you put your grey matter to work. It's just like training your muscle memory. The more you carry out an action, the less you'll have to process the thought about doing the same action when you actually execute it.

Likewise, the more you write an idea down, the more your mind remembers that idea. And the more your mind remembers the idea, the less you'll have to overthink when applying that idea. It helps you to be more efficient, and not to overthink anything. Overthinking may result in you being unsure of yourself, thus hesitate to start at all.

2.2 Writing Improves Your Memory

In fact, writing actually helps you to memorise better too. Students taking down notes by hand during lecture remember the facts better than students who rely on handout notes alone. Your brain has to form each letter of every word, and arrange each individual word to form meaningful sentences. And that resulting sentence has to convey the message correctly too.

Hence, your brain has to “work” way harder than simply “downloading” the notes. It doesn't matter whether you “download” through reading the handout notes, or worse, passively listening to prerecorded lectures.

The phrase “Practice Makes Perfect” actually makes perfect sense here. The more you do something, the more you'll remember it. And the more you remember it, the less you need to process the thoughts when executing the action. That's how you develop muscle memories. The more you practise something, the better you become at it.

It's the same for both physical and mental tasks. Whether shooting a basketball into the hoop, batting the ball in cricket, or even playing mentally intensive game of chess. The more you practise something, the better you'll get in actually doing it.

2.3 Writing Improves Your Deduction

When trying to solve a mathematical problem, it helps to list down all the constants before solving the equation. Having all the constants in view helps to identify what the values are, and where to plug them into the equation. I'm pretty sure your teachers/lecturers insisted that you also list down every single step to show your individual workings too, right?

Those of you who studied chemistry will remember this next example. When trying to balance a chemical reaction, you'll list down all the components beforehand. Once you plug them into the equation, you'll be able to work out what the resulting component's post reaction will be. And not only that, it'll also help you to determine the empirical value for each component too. Seeing the equation in front of your eyes helps you to balance things out much better than having to visualise it in your mind.

It's the same with creative writing too. Actually writing (or typing) your thoughts out helps you keep inventory of the salient points in direct view. Hence, keeping track of the

progress of whatever that you're going through becomes easier when you have the facts at your fingertips. Which brings us to the next point.

2.4 Recording Your Life In A Diary

Many of us have embarked in recording our lives in a diary before. What better place to pour our lives' deepest and darkest secrets than in a diary? I'm sure some of us even entertained the ominous thought that our secrets would be discovered by our next of kin upon our demise. Who knows, maybe even use the contents in our diary to solve our own murder along the way too.

But diaries are essentially for our own consumption, at least whilst we're still alive and kicking. It's never meant for general public consumption. Hence, you can literally get away with writing in ways that only you understand. And that even includes writing in some sort of codes too. After all, you wouldn't want to risk others finding out about your writings should you accidentally lose your diary, right?

Then there are also diaries that are *meant* for others to consume. And that public version of "diary" is called a journal. Unlike diaries, you log the events of a specific event or journey in a journal for the benefit of others. For example, a ship captain's journal. Everything that he logs into the journal becomes a permanent record to tell the

story of a particular voyage. The weather, the ship's operation and maintenance, the crew's morale, who and what they encounter, etc. And yes, if they do rescue a disabled boat along the way, you can bet that it'll be logged into the captain's journal too.

If something does happen during the voyage that needs looking into, the captain's journal will be the main point of reference. Whether a murder happened during the voyage, or the ship came across a portal that transported them back in time, you can bet it'll be logged into the journal too. Hence, logging a journal is always written for the benefit of others, not just yourself.

2.5 Logging Of Journal Goes Cyberspace

With the advent of the information age, the World Wide Web becomes everybody's local watering hole. It's the place where ideas and information are exchanged freely, even with total strangers. And logging of journals isn't limited just for official purposes only. Even unimportant individuals can have their own little journals where they log anything and everything that happens in their lives.

This online personal journal is known as web logging, or web-log, which eventually shortened to just "blog". With the dawn of the 21st century, blogging went mainstream. Anybody and everybody has their own personal blog. And unlike a private diary, blogs are literally personal journals,

free for the world to read. Even businesses jumped onto the bandwagon and set up their own corporate blogs too.

Now, practically everybody has their own private soapbox in cyberspace to share their thoughts and opinions. That's assuming you have audience who are interested in your thoughts, and are willing to read your blog.

3. Dawn Of The Blogging Era

It started out as an online version of a personal journal. An alternative medium to log the events that happened to you as you went through your life. Instead of penning it down physically in a book-format journal, you now have a virtual journal that's stored in cyberspace. As long as you have access to the Internet, you have access to your personal online journal.

3.1 Rise (And Fall) Of Personal Blogging

Back when you had to physically lay down ink onto paper, personal journalling wasn't really all that popular. Journalling was linked mainly to professional activities, e.g. mountaineers, divers, sailors, pilots, archeologists, etc. Only a handful of people journal their private lives.

But when journalling migrated from paper to cyberspace, many people jumped onto the bandwagon. Typing on keyboards was a whole lot "easier" than physically writing something down. As a result, many free blogging sites mushroomed overnight. You may be familiar with some of them, like Blogspot and WordPress.

People simply wanted a platform to channel their thoughts, dreams, opinions, grievances, etc. Nobody really thought much about what a blog can potentially achieve. The most important criterion is it's free to use. Who cares if nobody

other than your best friends will read them, or if your blog is choked full with advertisements. All we want is a little slice of cyberspace that we can claim to be our own.

But just like fashion trends, blogging started to wane in just a short couple of years. After the excitement of meticulous and frequent journalling has fizzled out, so too did the motivation to write. And it doesn't help if the visitor traffic to your blog also drops, sometimes all the way down to zero. It's not surprising that many simply abandon their personal blogs altogether. Are you one of them too?

3.2 Professional Media Blogging

Whether you realise it or not, there really is a professional use for blogging. Think of all the news portals, online magazines, corporate newsletters, etc., they all share one thing in common. They're all in the business of publishing the latest stories and updates to their audience. Instead of hosting them on dedicated (read: free) blogging platforms, they're hosted on their own websites. Their own unique URL ("Uniform Resource Locator" in Internet speak).

In very simple terms, a blog is a medium to host and spread stories. Be it latest news, car reviews, restaurant promotions, product recalls, or even knitting techniques to your members only knitting club. A blog is a medium just as much as television, radio, billboard, newspaper, and all other traditional platforms too.

Henceforth, it's no surprise that many large media houses host their own blogs... Except, is it even called a blog?... Yes, this concept is a little difficult to fathom. Especially when we're so used to the term "blog" to indicate platforms for individuals to blow their own horns. If you think about it, discounting the size of their payroll and brand perception, they're basically the same platform. They're just... blogs.

3.3 Corporate Blogging

Okay, news portals and magazines, we can understand. But corporate blogs?... Is that even a thing?... Actually it is. Businesses also have news and updates that they need to convey too. Public listed companies publishing their share trading activities, retailers announcing latest promotions, or even car companies introducing next year's models.

Business owners can choose whether to publish them on a mainstream media channel, or on their own blog. And if you already have your own media outlet, would you want to pay somebody else to publish it? Actually... The answer is a little more complicated than meets the eye...

Most businesses that aren't dedicated media houses don't specialise in publication. Hence they're unlikely to have the time, expertise, nor motivation to operate a publication professionally. So unless they have a department solely dedicated to maintaining their in-house publication, the

most logical choice is to outsource. You can outsource your publication work completely, to be hosted on a third-party platform. Or you can engage media companies to do the work, but publish it in your own corporate blog.

But the bigger question is this: if you already have your own platform, why would you want to let somebody else host your stories? That answer, unfortunately, is a little complicated.

3.4 What Makes A Blog Successful?

We've already established that with the right motivation, any Tom, Dick or Harry can write. But the bigger question is what motivates them to *want* to write? A great majority of personal blogs are abandoned by their owners over time. And the main reason for that is the lack of traffic.

Sure, when you embark on a new personal blog, you'd probably announce it to all of your friends and family. And they'll be your loyal content consumers from the get-go... Except, unless you keep producing exciting content that continues to tickle their fancy, they'll eventually stop visiting your blog. If they get bored with your content (or lack thereof), or if *you* get bored with creating fresh content, gasp!... It'll eventually die a natural death.

The key parameter to a successful blog is visitor traffic. In the print media speak, it's called readership. In TV speak,

it's called viewership. And in billboard speak, it's simply called traffic. I personally like the advertising term best - eyeballs on your content. Whichever term you choose to use, understand that it's all just a numbers game. The higher the number, the more successful you are.

You measure the success of any media by the amount of traffic that it generates. Not just new traffic, but also returning traffic. Attracting new audience is a great start. But to be truly successful, you need to maintain existing traffic too.

3.5 What Do *You* Want To Write For?

At the end of the day, it all boils down to yourself. What do you want to write for? Establish your own blog and build it up from scratch? Join an already established publication to build a name for yourself? Or maybe take the traditional route, and create content to be printed into books?

Whichever route you ultimately choose, the skills that you need to have to be successful are essentially the same. We'll elaborate the writing skills you'll need a little later in this book. In the meantime, there's an important question that you need to answer first.