

# Writer Trial Packet

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Howdy!

Thank you for your interest in writing for us.

We want to include guest writers in our weekly email newsletters.

Note:

Our thought is that the email would include information about you. For example:

**Jackie Jones, Los Angeles Public Library branch manager.**

If you would prefer anonymity, though, we can go with something like this:

**Anonymous, nonprofit housing case manager in Australia.**

If your organization has access to our trainings, you can choose any part from any of the trainings.

If your organization does not have access, here are a few options for you:

- Our intro webinar (1 hour) = <https://event.webinarjam.com/register/153/8v71osgl>
- Three tips for talking to parents (6 minutes) = <https://vimeo.com/manage/videos/652060760/ac99730917>
- Differential treatment (4 minutes) = <https://vimeo.com/manage/videos/489058546/50b25d5225>
- Reciprocity (6 minutes) = <https://vimeo.com/manage/videos/489056617/5ec5859af8>
- Pennies in the cup (5 minutes) = <https://vimeo.com/manage/videos/489053592/716544f4c7>
- Traumatic Brain Injury (8 minutes) = <https://vimeo.com/manage/videos/488557778/32b0db0623>
- Talk quieter (2 minutes) = <https://vimeo.com/manage/videos/478482964/6b8481a1ec>

Please read this document VERY closely. I put a TON of time into writing it.

Have a fantastic day!

Ryan

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## ABOUT US

### About the Email Newsletter

Our primary business is creating online training videos around homelessness and conflict de-escalation (and some related topics).

We also, though, send out a weekly free email newsletter.

It serves three primary functions:

- 1) Provide free training to organizations/people who cannot afford our paid trainings.
- 2) Remind our customers how awesome we are so they keep using our trainings.
- 3) Show potential customers how awesome we are, so they want to use our trainings.

To this end, the emails serve as mini-trainings. They teach a practical lesson and how to apply it.

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## About Our Audience

Currently, our audience is:

- 80% library staff members.
- 15% nonprofit staff members.
- 5% other (education, business, church, police, etc.)

A few things to note about them:

- They value good writing.
- They want to learn how to handle conflict in their daily work life.
- They want to treat people with compassion. They just want the bad behavior to stop, though.

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## *About the Tone*

The tone of our emails is casual and conversational.

We avoid big words unless they are essential, in which case we define them.

We try to be a little offbeat and quirky (and funny when possible), while also trying to offend as few people as possible. Of course, if you don't offend anyone, it is because no one read your writing!

We are very direct and "prescriptive." We tell people exactly what to do rather than hinting.

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## About the Values

The emails reflect our values.

We believe that:

- **Everyone has a responsibility to make the world a better place.**

We don't think a few elite people (in nonprofit or government) save the world. Everyone has a responsibility to work towards a better world.

We train "everyday heroes."

- **Hope—not cynicism—saves the world.**

We have not given up on the world or humanity. We believe that the world is worth fighting for and that most people will do the right thing most of the time (when called to a higher purpose).

We don't judge people for where they are in the journey. We call them to do better and be better.

- **You can have fun while saving the world**

We take the work of "world repair" very seriously. We don't take ourselves very seriously, though.

We try to have fun in our emails. Be quirky. Be fun.

- **Everyone deserves dignity.**

We especially care about the dignity of the most vulnerable. We don't mock fragility.

We also, believe that everyone else deserves dignity too. Even the jerks, bigots, homophobes, racists and cranky.

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## OUR WRITING FORMULA

Our weekly emails have three parts:

### **Hook**

This starts the emails. It “hooks” the reader and keeps them reading. It is interesting. It is often story based.

### **Lesson**

This is the meat of what we want to teach. What is the new fact, paradigm, skill, etc. that we are trying to teach people?

### **Application**

This is where we tell people EXACTLY what to do with the lesson.

You do not have to write the three parts in this order (though this should be their order in the email).

Experiment with writing the lesson first and the hook second.

At a minimum, you should choose the lesson/application from our trainings before you write the hook.

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## Part 1: “The Hook”

The function of the hook is to get the reader’s attention, so they keep reading.

People get a gazillion emails per day. If the hook is not interesting, people will stop reading.

Common types of hooks:

- Story
- Movie reference
- Historical reference
- Pop culture reference

The best hooks are personal stories. If you have a story that illustrates one of the lessons from our trainings, tell it.

A few tips: Tell the story in the “first person.” In other words say, “I saw a man near the bathroom pick up a book and swing it around like a light saber.” Do not say “A man near the bathroom picked up a book and swung it around like a light saber.”

The best stories paint a picture. What did the person look like? What is the room like? What did it smell like? Give the reader some sensory cues so they can imagine themselves in the story. You don’t have a lot of space (400 words isn’t much), but a few well-placed details make a huge difference.

The hook should lead into the lesson:

- The hook needs to set the lesson/application up (i.e. they have to be related).
- The best hooks actually add enormous value by providing a concrete example of the lesson. They don’t just entertain.
- It can be an example of how the lesson plays out in real life.
- It can make it easier to explain a concept because you just fleshed it out.
- If the lesson is research-based, a story of how the research was done can be helpful.
- If the lesson is confusing, the hook should provide a good example.

It should be:

- Really interesting. The best hooks pique the reader’s interest, so they want to learn more.
- Surprising (if possible). The most interesting things surprise and delight us.
- Relatable to a wide audience. It should be relatable to people of different ages, countries, professions, etc.

It should avoid:

- Controversy (let’s avoid abortion, partisan politics, the middle-eastern conflict, etc.)



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## Part 2: “The Lesson”

The lesson is the underlying principle that we are trying to teach.

It is often one of the following:

- **Empathy** – Helping readers to understand people who are not like them.
- **Psychology** – Some principle from psychology that is helpful.
- **Tool** – Some practical skill that readers should use.

You should either write the lesson first or at least know what the lesson is before you write the hook. Everything flows from the lesson.

The lesson should be:

- A single idea. Don't try to cover multiple topics in one email. There may be subpoints, but not more than 1-2. **I cannot stress this enough. Pick a single idea, not several ideas!!!**
- Clear that it came from research (if it did)
- Insightful. Oftentimes what we write is fairly mundane (e.g. you should smile at people), but we turn these mundane ideas into memorable actionable insights (e.g. when you smile at someone, their brain releases dopamine, which lowers their aggression).

Avoid:

- Insights that are really just a reminder of a problem. (E.g. 45% of people give off aggressive body language cues). They aren't helpful because there is nothing the reader can do with that information (other than feel bad about the world).

It is ok to be technical in the lesson (especially at the beginning) because you can use the hook to illustrate the point. That said, simplify/clarify as much as humanly possible.

Consider:

- Putting technical terms in quotes so they stand out as important (and based on the literature).
- Using quotes that are especially poignant and on-point. Don't overdo the quotes. If all we do is quote someone else we aren't adding any value.

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## Part 3: “The Application”

This is where we make the lesson super practical for the reader. We tell them EXACTLY how they can apply to the lesson to their own life.

If you are struggling to write the application, you may have chosen a bad lesson.

It should be:

- **Prescriptive** (tell the reader EXACTLY what to do).
- Imminently **practical**.
- SUPER **specific** (don’t make people figure out on their own how to do anything).
- A **single** “tip” or “tool” (it can have a few parts, but never more than three). There is more value in a single piece of advice than a list of advice. Faced with overload, people do nothing. Better to have people do 1 of 1 actions than 0 of 5. If there are several options, consider using “there are lots of ways to use this insight... here is one.”
- **Actionable** in the next 24 hours if possible.
- **Clear**.
- **Flow** directly from the lesson.

Do not offer general **platitudes** like “have empathy” or “be a good listener” or “be trustworthy.” Instead tell people exactly what to do, such that if they do these things they will “have empathy” “be a good listener” or “be trustworthy.”

Consider using:

- Checklists
- If/Then statements
- Process (step 1, step 2)
- An example of how to do it

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## OTHER ELEMENTS

### Subject line

In many ways the subject line is the most important part of the email. If the subject line doesn't persuade people to read the email it doesn't matter how good the email is.

Writing a good subject line is very time consuming.

It is worth all the time spent on it.

ALWAYS write at least 25 subject lines before choosing one. Quality reveals quantity.

### Tips:

- Consider using the "Curiosity Gap." Do not give away the whole email in the subject line. Leave a question hanging out there. Just be careful not to do it in a deceptive way that destroys trust (i.e. clickbait).
- It should be 6-8 words (10 max).

### For this exercise:

1. First write the whole email.
2. Second, write 25 potential subject lines.
3. Finally, pick the best one (but send me the other 24 too).

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## First Line

The first line of the email is almost as important as the subject line.

If it doesn't engage and grip (and titillate) the reader, they won't read the second line.

Make sure it is engaging!

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## Formatting

Formatting is INCREDIBLY important.

Oftentimes, what people think of as “good writing” is actually just “good formatting.”

People do not read emails. They scan them. Proper formatting encourages people to scan “heavy.” They also make sure that people see the most important parts.

Key Ideas:

- **Big blocks of text are intimidating.**

They scare people away because they look like hard work.

Break it up into shorter paragraphs.

- **Use headers for every section except the hook.**

Put a header above the lesson and application to make it clear you are switching parts.

The header should give them an idea of what they are going to learn.

- **Use bold, italics, underline to draw the readers’ attention to important stuff.**
- **Bullet lists and number lists make things much easier to read.**

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Use the “Pac-Man Rule”:

I use the “Pac-Man rule.” When you look at the text, there should be plenty of alleys where “Pac-Man” can go. And there should be some bullet points for Pac-Man to eat.



Consider the two versions below of the exact same email. They have identical text, but VERY different formatting. Which one would you rather read?

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## EXAMPLE OF AN EMAIL WITH BAD FORMATTING

My girlfriend got pregnant when I was 20 years old. (I might have had something to do with that...) Being young parents was REALLY FREAKING HARD!!! It wasn't just hard because we were young. We were also broke. I never thought of us as "poor" (my parents helped a lot), but technically we were: I qualified for the "Earned Income Tax Credit" and My girlfriend qualified for *Medicaid* and *WIC* (a welfare program like food stamps for new mothers). We did our best as parents, but we didn't always do a great job. The stress of being broke with a child caused fights between us. We would have been better parents if we had more money... no, seriously we would have... Allow me to explain... Two poverty researchers developed the "*Family Stress Model*." Here's the basic idea: Poverty is really stressful. The stress creates conflict in the family. The conflict lowers the effectiveness of the parents. Less effective parenting results in more problem behavior from children. (Note: I'm not saying that poor parents = bad parents. I'm saying that the stress of poverty would lower the effectiveness of ANY parent). What's my point? I have two. When you see a poor or homeless parent struggling with their children: Don't judge: If you are a parent and you were thrust into poverty, your parenting skills would suffer. Have some empathy: He or she may need a little extra assistance (or grace) to navigate parenthood. Want to learn more about working with parents? Our next webinar is about this very topic (see below for info!). (Oh, by the way, that 18-year-old pregnant girlfriend is now my wife, Krissie. Our 20-year wedding anniversary is this coming May!)

Peace,

Ryan

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## EXAMPLE OF AN EMAIL WITH GOOD FORMATTING

My girlfriend got pregnant when I was 20 years old. (I might have had something to do with that...)

Being young parents was REALLY FREAKING HARD!!!

It wasn't just hard because we were young.

We were also broke.

I never thought of us as "poor" (my parents helped a lot), but technically we were:

- I qualified for the "*Earned Income Tax Credit*"
- My girlfriend qualified for *Medicaid* and *WIC* (a welfare program like food stamps for new mothers).

We did our best as parents, but we didn't always do a great job. The stress of being broke with a child caused fights between us.

**We would have been better parents if we had more money... no, seriously we would have...**

Allow me to explain...

Two poverty researchers developed the "*Family Stress Model*." Here's the basic idea:

- 1) Poverty is really stressful.
- 2) The stress creates conflict in the family.
- 3) The conflict lowers the effectiveness of the parents.
- 4) Less effective parenting results in more problem behavior from children.

(Note: *I'm not saying that poor parents = bad parents. I'm saying that the stress of poverty would lower the effectiveness of ANY parent*).

What's my point?

I have two. When you see a poor or homeless parent struggling with their children:

1. **Don't judge:** If you are a parent and you were thrust into poverty, your parenting skills would suffer.
2. **Have some empathy:** He or she may need a little extra assistance (or grace) to navigate parenthood.



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Want to learn more about working with parents?

Our next webinar is about this very topic (see below for info!).

*(Oh, by the way, that 18-year-old pregnant girlfriend is now my wife, Krissie. Our 20-year wedding anniversary is this coming May!)*

Peace,

Ryan

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## WRITING GUIDELINES

[HemingwayApp.com](http://HemingwayApp.com)

We use <http://www.hemingwayapp.com/> religiously.

Please use it. Here's how:

- 1) Go to <https://www.hemmingwayapp.com>.
- 2) Paste your text into the box with all of the colored text.
- 3) See the suggestions on the right side of the screen.

### NOTES:

- You do NOT need to download the app.
- You do NOT need to sign in.
- You do NOT need to pay any money.

The screenshot shows the Hemingway Editor interface. The main text area contains the following text: "Hemingway App makes your writing bold and clear. The app highlights lengthy, complex sentences and common errors; if you see a yellow sentence, shorten or split it. If you see a red highlight, your sentence is so dense and complicated that your readers will get lost trying to follow its meandering, splitting logic — try editing this sentence to remove the red. You can utilize a shorter word in place of a purple one. Mouse over them for hints. Adverbs and weakening phrases are helpfully shown in blue. Get rid of them and pick words with force, perhaps. Phrases in green have been marked to show passive voice. You can format your text with the toolbar. Paste in something you're working on and edit away. Or, click the Write button and compose something new!"

The sidebar on the right shows the following feedback:

- Readability: Grade 6, Good
- Words: 133
- 2 adverbs, meeting the goal of 2 or fewer.
- 1 use of passive voice, meeting the goal of 2 or fewer.
- 1 phrase with a simpler alternative.
- 1 of 11 sentences is hard to read.
- 1 of 11 sentences is very hard to read.

Two callout bubbles are present: a blue one at the bottom left pointing to the main text area, and an orange one at the bottom right pointing to the feedback sidebar.

Select all this text and then paste your text here.

Get your feedback here.

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Here is what I am looking for:

- Grade Level

The grade level should ideally be between 3 and 5.

If you go above 6, it needs work.

The easiest way to lower grade level is to:

- a) Eliminate hard to read sentences (see below).
- b) Break long, complicated sentences, into smaller simpler sentences.

- “Very Hard to Read Sentences”

There shouldn't be any.

If HemmingwayApp flags a sentence as very hard to read, then you need to rewrite it. Consider turning it into two or more smaller sentences.

- “Hard to Read Sentences”

Try to eliminate all hard to read sentences. Occasionally you'll have to leave one because there isn't an easier way to write a sentence or HemminwayApp.com is being overly picky.

- Passive Voice

Eliminate passive voice whenever humanly possible.

- Word Count

The word count for the body (not the subject line) will usually be in the 250-300 range. Occasionally it will go up to 400. We only VERY rarely go above 400 words.

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## TEMPLATE

You can use the following template:

Subject Line: [Subject line you chose here]

[Hook goes here]

**[Header for the lesson goes here]**

[lesson goes here]

**[Header for the application goes here]**

[application goes here]

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Word count: [Put your word count here]

HemmingwayApp Grade Level: [Put your hemmingwayapp grade level here]

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25 subject lines:

1. [Write your 25 possible subject lines]
2. [Write your 25 possible subject lines]
3. [Write your 25 possible subject lines]
4. [Write your 25 possible subject lines]
5. [Write your 25 possible subject lines]
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## SAMPLE EMAILS