

On writing: Leslie O'Flahavan gets the point

I definitely wanted to interview Leslie O'Flahavan for this series, and I am so glad she agreed to be featured this month. She's been teaching writing for years and offers an academic perspective that's a bit different from marketing/communications folks.



Leslie O'Flahavan,
E-Write

Leslie O'Flahavan is a get-to-the point writer and an experienced, versatile writing instructor. As E-WRITE owner since 1996, Leslie has been writing content and teaching customized writing courses for Fortune 500 companies, government agencies, and non-profit organizations. Leslie can help the most stubborn, inexperienced, or word-phobic employees at your organization improve their writing skills, so they can do their jobs better.

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1. What role does writing play in your work and how important a skill is it?

Writing IS my work. Because I am a writer myself and a life-long writing teacher, writing plays the largest role possible in my work. Of course, I may be a bit biased, but I think writing is an essential skill. At work, writing is perhaps THE essential communication skill.

2. Does writing well still matter in a digital/text/emoji world?

Yes, writing well matters even more in our digital/emoji world. Some people have the idea that “no one really writes or reads anymore.” I don’t agree with this at all. If you text, you are writing. If you Instagram a picture of your brunch, and you add some words to the picture, you are writing. It’s elitist to think that only academic tracts or annual reports are “real” writing. Writing happens every time someone keyboards or scrawls some words. Because we’re writing so much now, doing it well matters a lot.

3. What’s the best advice you’ve received or would give on how to improve writing skills?

How you improve your writing skills depends on what you need to write, the skills you’re struggling with as a writer, and which stage in your career you find yourself. In most cases, the best advice I could give is to find a good example or model of what you’re trying to write before you begin. So, if you have to write a proposal, find an example of a proposal that won the funding. Read it analytically to see how the writer constructed it. If you have to write the “About Us” page for your website, find three or four models of excellent About Us pages and one that’s not very good. Before you begin writing, contrast the bad one to the good ones. Analytical reading will help prepare you to repeat the successful writing

strategies you've observed.

4. What are your top three writing resources or references (digital or paper-based)?

I like wiktionary.org, *Letting Go of the Words* by Ginny Redish, and Grammar Girl's QuickandDirtyTips.com

5. Do you follow a style guide, and if so, which one?

In my work, I often am asked to follow my client's style guide, which will sometimes be an in-house guide or a published guide such as Chicago Manual of Style, with some company-specific adaptations. I'm always glad to follow a style guide.

6. What's your top writing/grammar/usage pet peeve?

As a writing teacher, I try not to be peevish or to cringe very much. After all, I'm supposed to be helping people whose writing is cringe-worthy or whose grammar blunders tweak my peeve nerve. I'm not put off by a genuine writing error. These things happen. In fact, I recently misspelled my own name in an email. What puts me off is when people act like fixing the error isn't important. Or when they treat the plain language movement as a fad. That makes me cranky.

7. What's your favorite word and what's your least favorite?

In 2016, my favorite word is *rapport*. And *pimples* has been my least favorite word for decades, since I had them, back in the late 70s.

I love Leslie's advice on modeling your writing on something that you think is good. Everyone should work on recognizing when something works well and analyzing what makes it so. Check back here on August 25, when I will interview another marketing/communications pro on the importance of writing. And if you need help with your writing, I am happy to lend a pen!

