On writing: Chuck Tanowitz thinks like a journalist

This month, I asked Chuck Tanowitz to give me his thoughts on writing. He studied journalism, and later worked in radio and television news. From there, he made the transition to public relations. Throughout his communications career, Chuck has relied on having strong writing skills and a sharp mind, as you will read in his answers below.



Chuck Tanowitz

Name: Chuck Tanowitz

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Chuck Tanowitz is a content, marketing and PR professional living in the Boston area. His written pieces have appeared under his name and under that of his clients, in everything from the *New York Times* to the deepest trade technology publications.

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

Public relations relies on writing. Pitching media requires it, but so does social engagement and the by-lined articles that clients want us to write all the time.

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

It matters now more than ever. Writing well is not just about typing in a few words, it's about communicating. Even if you're using a few emojis in your texting, your job as a communicator is to convey a thought, emotion or opinion using the tools at your disposal that are appropriate of the medium of choice. If that medium is text and the emoji helps convey some crucial aspect of that thought, then go ahead and use it. But the words remain necessary and the shortened length mean that the editing skills honed over a lifetime are all that much more important.

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

Good writing is good editing.

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

It sounds silly, but my top writing resource remains Google. It helps me with spelling, grammar, usage and fact checking. You can't trust everything, but mostly it's a solid resource. My second-favorite is my social network of fellow writers. Third is the AP Stylebook.

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

Being a former journalist, I tend to follow AP Style. An old

employer of mine hated the Oxford comma, and now I continue to struggle with it.

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

I hate passive writing. Not that I hate it in all circumstances, but I find a lot of young writers fall back on it to hide that they're actually missing information and facts. We used to do that in TV when we would say "a man was shot" when we lacked information about who fired the gun. TV got around some of that by eliminating verbs altogether, with lines such as "gunshots today leave one dead and two injured." But if writers simply looked for the verb "to be" and cut it back, they'd find their writing greatly improved.

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

No one word is better or worse than another, the context matters most.

What resonates for you? Let me know in the comments. And be on the lookout the last Thursday of every month for On Writing, where professionals share their thoughts on one of the most important communications skills.