

The second major step in improving my writing skills?

by Chris Seijger

After completing my first writing course 'Technical Writing and Editing' in May 2012, I greatly improved my technical writing skills. *Roget's Thesaurus* and the *Concise Oxford English Dictionary* became essential writing tools. My sentences shortened, and I became aware of the importance of every single word. Now the course 'Perfecting your Publication' ends, I wonder whether I am able to make a second major step in improving my writing skills. This essay discusses the changes I aim to incorporate in my writing process, after participating in the Perfecting your Publication course.

The course taught me four key lessons which I already try to apply. First, before I start to write, I have to pay attention to the structure of the writing. Writing down the explicit purpose of drafts and separate paragraphs help to clarify my own thoughts about the paper, as well as the order within the paper. For my next paper, I want to write a one page concept paper and stick to the PPAAGODRE steps. Second, I should postpone the revising and editing to the end of the writing process. This should save me time, and for this assignment, I allowed myself one round of revising after I completed it. Third, I need to focus on every single word as the assignments showed that my writing is wordy. Cutting down the number of words is possible through this heightened awareness and my thesaurus. Fourth, I have to focus on my adverbs, as this advice returned in each assignment. Yet I don't know how to change this, besides checking them carefully in my writing. Perhaps it helps to seek for incorrect constructions as 'matter of importance' and 'sharper formulated'.

The main lesson I take from the course is that writing is a skill which can only be improved through serious practice. Besides the points raised above, there are a few other things that have my attention now, which I also want to incorporate to improve my writing. First, to focus

on the use of tenses. While discussing my assignment in class, this was mentioned as the main problem as I have to clarify the differences between empirical observations and personal interpretations. Second, I need to avoid everyday language and use strong verbs instead. The list of verbs Catherine wrote on the whiteboard is very helpful as they can serve as my alarm bells. Third, I want to improve my vocabulary further. Yet I am not convinced by the use of vocabulary cards or the Academic Word Lists. Maybe I rely on my thesaurus and dictionary and the English books I occasionally read.

Did the course improve my writing skills? Absolutely. Whether the step is as big as in the first course depends on me to truly incorporate the changes discussed in this essay. The lecturer provided me the lessons, now it is up to me to turn these lessons into practice!