

# Ben Franklin's 5 Tips for Making Americans Better Writers

On average, American students demonstrate poor reading skills. Indeed, the most recent [Nation's Report Card](#) shows that only 38% of high school seniors are proficient in this area.

But high school writing skills are worse: only 27% of students – one in four – achieve proficiency in writing.

In 1733 Benjamin Franklin [noted](#), “It seems to me that there is scarce any Accomplishment more necessary to a Man of Sense, than that of *Writing well* in his Mother Tongue.” Franklin then went on to offer several tips for forming better writers, five of which are summarized below:

## 1. Show your written works to others.

As with many things, Franklin understood that a writer will never improve unless he receives feedback and critique from others. So as to avoid biased critiques from “friends and enemies,” he suggested writing anonymously.

## 2. Avoid academic-speak.

*“The Fondness of some Writers for such Words as carry with them an Air of Learning, renders them unintelligible to more than half their Countrymen. If a Man would that his Writings have an Effect on the Generality of Readers, he had better imitate that Gentleman, who would use no Word in his Works that was not well understood by his Cook-maid.”*

## 3. Be concise.

In addition to avoiding big words, Franklin encourages writers

to be brief in writing their argument. According to Franklin, writing filled with “needless” information is offensive and confusing to the reader. On the other hand, Franklin cautions writers to not sacrifice clarity of thought while aiming for brevity.

#### **4. Know your audience.**

Every author, Franklin notes, should have a good understanding of the knowledge level of his readers and the writing style to which they are accustomed, and adapt his own to whatever those may be.

#### **5. Seek to improve knowledge.**

*“I shall venture to lay it down as a Maxim, That no Piece can properly be called good, and well written, which is void of any Tendency to benefit the Reader, either by improving his Virtue or his Knowledge. This Principle every Writer would do well to have in View, whenever he undertakes to write. All Performances done for mere Ostentation of Parts, are really contemptible; and withal far more subject to the Severity of Criticism, than those more meanly written, wherein the Author appears to have aimed at the Good of others.”*