

Benjamin Franklin's 4 Steps to Becoming a Great Writer

If Twitter or Facebook had existed during the colonial period, Benjamin Franklin likely would have been one of its wittiest contributors, as evidenced by his pithy words of wisdom in *Poor Richard's Almanac*.

But Franklin wrote far more than witty slogans. In fact, his personal correspondence, policy proposals, and other writings take up a full 37 volumes in the online collection, [*The Papers of Benjamin Franklin*](#).

So how did Franklin get to be such a prolific, proficient, and admirable author?

The answer is simple: He taught himself.

In his [*Autobiography*](#), Franklin explains that while he loved the printed word, his original writing was far from praiseworthy. This changed, however, when he took the following four steps:

1. He Received Constructive Criticism

Unlike many parents today, Franklin's father was not full of praise for his son's achievements. He recognized that his son's writing had some flaws, and took him aside one day to point them out. Franklin – again unlike many of us today – took kindly to the criticism and began to look for ways to improve.

1. He Imitated the Writing of Others

Always reading, Franklin found a publication known as the *Spectator*. He enjoyed the writing it contained and set out to make his own like it.

1. He Invented Exercises to Practice

Once Franklin had found the *Spectator*, he began to invent various games and tests of skill to see how well he could imitate its authors. These included:

- Reading an article, putting it away for a time, and then trying to replicate it from memory.
- Rewriting a prose article in poetry format, so as to expand his vocabulary.
- Taking notes on the articles, mixing them up in a confusing mess, and then trying to reorganize and write a better article than the original.

1. He Used Spare Moments

Franklin never wasted time. As he explains, he used every moment he could spare from work or other activities to practice improving his writing – and all before he was 16 years old!

Today, only [27 percent](#) of America's students are proficient in writing. Clearly, the education system is not having much success at passing on this important skill to the next generation. Might our best hope for sustaining the well-written word in America be for individuals to take Franklin's self-education model to heart?

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