

Pssst...It's Not Just Students Who Can't Write ...

In the world of professors, higher education, and academia, producing high-quality content is essential. Many academics dutifully follow this prescription and produce thousands of pages every year.

There's only one problem. As has been [previously noted](#) at Intellectual Takeout by Daniel Lattier, most of the academic work professors produce goes unread (unless you count the author).

Lattier explains that there are two major reasons for this strange scenario. The first is that the quest for tenure drives many academics to publish. The second is due to specialization, which causes academics to write on topics that only a narrow group of individuals cares about or understands.

But according to Professor Rachel Toor, there is another reason academics don't have a big audience for their labors. Put simply, they don't know how to write.

Writing in *The Chronicle of Higher Education*, Toor [explains](#) that many professors get sucked into the black hole of the Ivory Tower. They spend time with high-minded individuals. They grow used to reading intellectual materials. And as a result, they embrace ego and forget about the common, pre-academic origins from which they arose.

The trick then, Toor implies, is for academics to go back to their roots and recover the interest and simplicity with which they first began their studies, and then pass that on to their readers. Five of Toor's suggestions on how to do this are summarized below:

- 1. Write Like You Talk** – Such a practice humanizes the writer

and enables the reader to consider him a friend. As a result, the words he writes will sink deeper and be taken to heart more readily.

2. Make the Piece Enjoyable – Nothing kills interest in a subject more quickly than technical jargon. Toor suggests that writing in a story-format can make academic information more digestible.

3. Avoid Lofty Words – Coinciding with writing in an interesting manner, Toor insists that academics avoid “pretentious language.” Wearing your smarts on your sleeve is not an effective way to win friends and influence others.

4. Be Clear – Keeping it simple never hurts anyone. Being able to bring something down to the bottom shelf and explain a difficult concept is often a sign of wisdom and expertise.

5. Be Concise – In the fast-paced, social-media oriented world we live in, ain’t nobody got time to wade through a treatise. Selecting the best points and keeping things short and sweet is likely to pack the most punch.

The fact is, these tips are practical for any individual, not just academics. As is often noted, Americans today have great difficulty discussing issues and ideas with one another without causing excessive contention and offense.

Does such a state stem from the same problem that academics have? Have the various sides in society forgotten how to explain their points in a simple, concise, enjoyable, and friendly manner? And if both sides were brought back to such a method of debate, would we be able to get back to learning, growing, and making progress as a society?

“We all want progress. But progress means getting nearer to the place where you want to be. And if you have taken a wrong turning then to go forward does not get you any nearer. If you are on the wrong road progress means doing an about-turn and

walking back to the right road.... And I think if you look at the present state of the world it's pretty plain that humanity has been making some big mistake. We're on the wrong road. And if that is so we must go back. Going back is the quickest way on." – C.S. Lewis

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