

August 2010



For more than twenty years, since quitting the Department of Foreign Affairs, Mike lived and worked in Asia running his own research consultancy, first in Taiwan and then in the Philippines. He has now returned to enjoy Australia with his family while continuing with his writing and editing.

Mike now makes his living as a full-time freelance writer and editor as well as mentor, encouraging young people especially to develop their writing and communication skills.

Mike is an experienced economic and political analyst and specialises in the development editing of complex reports. He is also now into training and has developed his own course in effective writing - combining creativity with productivity. It is offered both in face to face classes as well as by remote learning. The manual is freely available to readers of this newsletter. Check it out at www.workingwithwords.com.au

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Working with words

A newsletter for writers

There is always something to write about

I remember some advice given me early in my career that there is always something happening around you that is worth writing about and it is advice I have sought to follow. I have always found it good practice, no matter what else comes along, to find some time each week to find some topic about which to write.

Many of us spend at least some part of the week at the keyboard processing words, either for ourselves or for our employer and just like any other task, we need to keep in shape. Blogging has made it all so much easier to do so.

My own writing genre inclines towards topical events verging on the "documentary" style rather than fiction which still remains a challenge for me. I am working on that one but don't hold your breath.

July proved to be an extremely busy month finalizing the editing of two major projects for an international organization plus local work which allowed me to keep to my own schedule of writing every week.

However, I have had little time to write for myself other than my monthly commentaries on Taiwan

and the Philippines – both countries in which I have lived and worked – and which I have been commenting on for more than 10 years (since 1977 in the case of Taiwan, and 2001 in the case of the Philippines).

This coming month I hope to have time to refine the guide book on effective writing that I published earlier in the year and which, with experience of use, needs a little tweaking in places to make it easier to follow. Hopefully I can complete that task during August.

Mike Clancy

The overlooked office suite

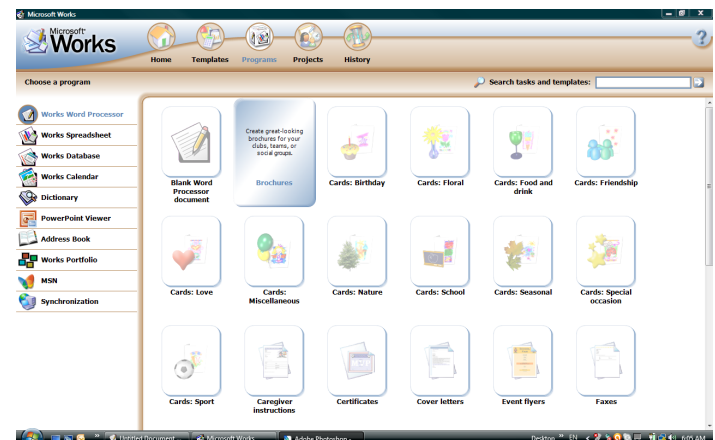
When was the last time you opened Microsoft Works? Works is a simple office or home application suite that comes with your (Windows) operating system.

A few years back Works was sold as a stripped-down version of Office. Now Microsoft gives it away for free. Many people never get around to opening it and dive straight into MS-Office.

That is a pity since Works provides an ideal means of cutting your teeth on the common applications. The interface is bright and colourful and in a format that is guaranteed to appeal to young and old who are sometimes intimidated by the no-nonsense approach of Office.

What is more, unlike Office, Works comes with its own menu from which you can select the application you want to use or choose a template for a particular task. It is ideal for home or school use. For young people learning computer basics, it is an effective teaching/learning tool.

Works provides you with a word processor, a spreadsheet and a data-



base application, all of which bear uncanny resemblances to earlier versions of Office software.

Perhaps this is not surprising. What this means though is that perhaps, you have all your initial needs on your computer already and you may want to check out what you get for free (or with the initial purchase) before spending hundreds of dollars on the latest software, much of which you may never use.

The word processor provides templates for brochures, birthday cards, event flyers—even grocery lists. The spreadsheet will allow you to construct not only a financial worksheet but also a fitness tracking schedule, household records and a vehicle log book among other things.

You can read more on this topic in Effective Writing or online at www.workingwithwords.com.au

Recent blogs from Mike

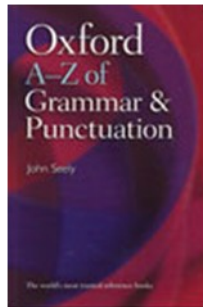
Before returning to Australia, Mike spent more than 20 years living and working in Asia and is well-known for his insightful analysis. His most recent monthly commentaries on developments in Taiwan and the Philippines — both countries in which he has lived and worked can be found on his writing blog: <http://mike-clancy.blogspot.com/>

- The deal is done (Taiwan) [click here to read](#)
- The different faces of corruption (Philippines) [click here to read](#)

You can read this newsletter online at <http://thecreativegenie.blogspot.com/>

The importance of punctuation

The appendixes to Effective Writing provides a succinct list of common writing errors. It is not a complete list but rather a compilation of some of those I come across most frequently as an editor. A handy reference to have is the Oxford A-Z of Grammar and Punctuation. This is available from most bookstores.



Use of capitals

When it comes to headings, you should understand the difference between **Sentence style capitalisation** and **Headline Style Capitalisation**. In sentence-style capitalization only the first word in a title, the first word in a subtitle, and any proper names are capitalized. Headline style is a little more complex. In this style, many of the heading words are capitalised – but not all. There are no hard and fast conventions, rather it is more a matter of appearance, emphasis and grammar (and of course consistency). Some words are always capitalised (such as

nouns, pronouns, verbs and adjectives); some are always lower case (unless used as the first or last word in a title). These include the definite and indefinite articles and prepositions (unless they are stressed); other times a decision is called for. If this is likely to cause a problem for you, opt for sentence style headings.

One other aspect of using capitals is worth mentioning, especially in the context of e-mail.

Some people use capitalisation as a means of emphasis. However, capitalisation has also come to be associated with anger or displeasure. “PLEASE READ THE ATTACHMENT TO THIS E-MAIL” may to you mean no more than “hey, don’t forget to read the attachment since it’s important”. However, your reader could easily read into it “You idiot, why have you not opened the attachment”.

Be careful!

Colons and semicolons

We will not explain the use of full-stops (periods) and commas here. Most people appear to understand the basics but many people get into trouble when it comes to using colons and semicolons.

Colons have three basic uses. They can introduce lists (both inline lists as well as ordered and unordered lists); they are often used to introduce a quotation and they are also used in a similar manner to commas and semicolons to differentiate between the clauses of a sentence. A colon is considered the strongest sentence break and is commonly used as a break between two main clauses.

Colons are also used to differentiate parts of a heading and caption (such as “Table 3: Recent growth rates”). Sometimes the pipe (|) is called upon to fulfil this role.

Where two sentences are part of a common idea, the second building on the first, the semico-

lon can be used to turn the two separate sentences into a single sentence.

Care needs to be taken that sentences do not become too long or too convoluted but often the single sentence makes for more fluid writing that by coming to a full stop. In sentences containing multiple clauses they can also be used together with commas to make the flow of ideas easier to understand.

One quick rule to determine where to use what, is to read the passage aloud and determine where the natural breaks are to be found. A comma represents one beat; a semicolon, two beats; a colon, three beats; and a full stop, four beats.

Just look at the preceding sentence to see how commas and semicolons work together.

..More next month

“If you cannot say what you mean, you will never mean what you say”

The origins of the above quote are obscure but it proved to be one of the most memorable lines from the movie epic, *The Last Emperor*. In writing for any audience, it is a good maxim to keep in mind.

Communication involves the ability of the author to relate essential facts and ideas to the reading audience in a manner that the reader is able to understand and then, if needed, act upon. Writing style should convey this ability to communicate; indeed it is the hallmark of anyone in the teaching, research or knowledge management professions.

Dr. Michael Clancy is a published author, freelance writer, researcher and editor who has lived and worked in Asia for more than 30 years. He has now returned to Australia and has his home on the Queensland Gold Coast. He travels between Australia, the Middle East and Asia undertaking research and editing assignments for the ILO, various UN bodies and the Asian Development Bank.

As an editor, Mike believes that the best output can be obtained when writers, researchers and editors work closely together in the development and delivery of the final product. Mike firmly believes that an important role for the editor to play is that of “author’s advocate” who, while staying true to the author’s intent, looks at any piece as would a general reader. His suggestions to author’s are often made with this role in mind.

Mike is always available to assist writers and researchers with any queries they may have. Prices are reasonable, professionalism is assured.

- Volume, manuscript and copy editing
- Manuscript development
- Assistance with theses and dissertations
- Corporate presentations, manuals and reports
- Tutoring and course presentations —effective writing
- Staff creativity and productivity training

For a no-obligation discussion and quotation please e-mail Mike at thecreativegenie@gmail.com or skype: MikeClancy2

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