

Build Your Writing Skills -- Part III

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By reading the first and last paragraphs of most non-fiction writing, you should be able to grasp both premise and conclusion of an author's thoughts.

After you have completed the initial draft, put it aside for two or three days. Come back to review it when you are fresh. Be a stern critic. Have you started each heading or subheading with a topic sentence or paragraph that states what you are setting out to do? Do the main sections and subdivisions present the material clearly? Have you omitted points that you listed in the outline? Is there unnecessary or repetitious information? Does the conclusion summarize what has gone before? Are your footnotes and bibliography correct?

Once you have gone over the draft for content and accuracy, review and edit it for style. Try to read as objectively as you can. Remember the underlying importance of grammar and criticize your use of words, phrases, clauses, sentences, and paragraphs. Does one thought flow evenly and obviously from another?

You might want to change the sequence of sentences or paragraphs for better presentation. If so, cut, shift, and staple new parts together. Try to be as brief as possible. Delete what is superfluous and distracting to your main thoughts. It has been said that crisp writing usually has a good deal of shortening in it! The total effect must be readable. Rewrite a section if necessary. Remember that carelessness in spelling, punctuation, and capitalization will also influence the quality of your work.

Now you are ready to make the final copy. Type it if you can, or write very legibly with a carbon copy for future reference. Leave generous margins on the left and right sides of each page. When you have finished, proofread the paper, making any corrections neatly. Review your references or footnotes once again for accuracy. It is always a good idea to prepare a title page and if possible, to submit the completed assignment in a folder or binder.

Your grades may depend on how well you have mastered these writing techniques. When your

marked paper has been returned, review the instructor's comments -- you can learn from mistakes you might have made. Remember that how well you write will also be an important measure of your success after you leave school. With patience and hard work you can experience the satisfaction of being happy with the content and style of your writing. The choice of words is right, the grammar is correct, the flow of language is smooth, and it says just what you hoped it would! That is the award of a

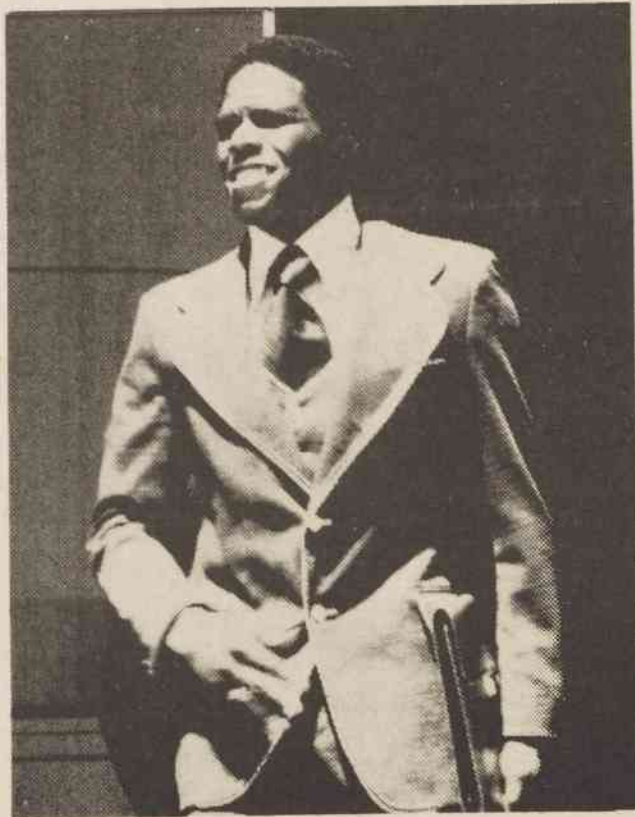
successful writer.

This article, "How to Build Your Writing Skills", is one in a series developed for college students by the Association of American Publishers. Other topics in the series are "How to Get the Most Out of Your Textbooks", "How to Prepare Successfully for Examinations", and "How to Improve Your Reading Skills". Individual copies are available in booklet form free of charge to students. If you would like copies please write to: AAP STUDENT SERVICE, One Park Avenue, New York, N.Y. 10016.

Solutions

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