

A top-down view of a person's hands writing in a notebook on a wooden desk. The person is wearing a blue and white striped shirt and a gold watch. A laptop is open to the left, and a camera with a red and white braided strap is to the right. The scene is lit with warm, natural light.

# STORYTELLING SKILLS

SUMMER SESSIONS

## WRITING & BLOGGING

# THE BASICS

▶ READ

▶ EDIT

▶ PRACTICE

▶ THREE BIG QUESTIONS...



# THREE BIG QUESTIONS...

1. **What are you writing about?**
2. **What are you writing for?**
3. **Who are you writing for?**

**Activity:** Discuss these questions in 2s or 3s  
Write down one idea that you want to write about

# STORY IS KING

Stories are 22 times more memorable than bare facts.

Which advice would you listen to more closely:

"Don't feed the bear, it's dangerous."

OR

"Little Charlie from across the street tried to feed the bear last week and got his arm torn into a bloody mash."

The audience will not tune in to watch information. You wouldn't, I wouldn't. No one would or will. The audience will only tune in and stay tuned in to watch drama.

David Mamet

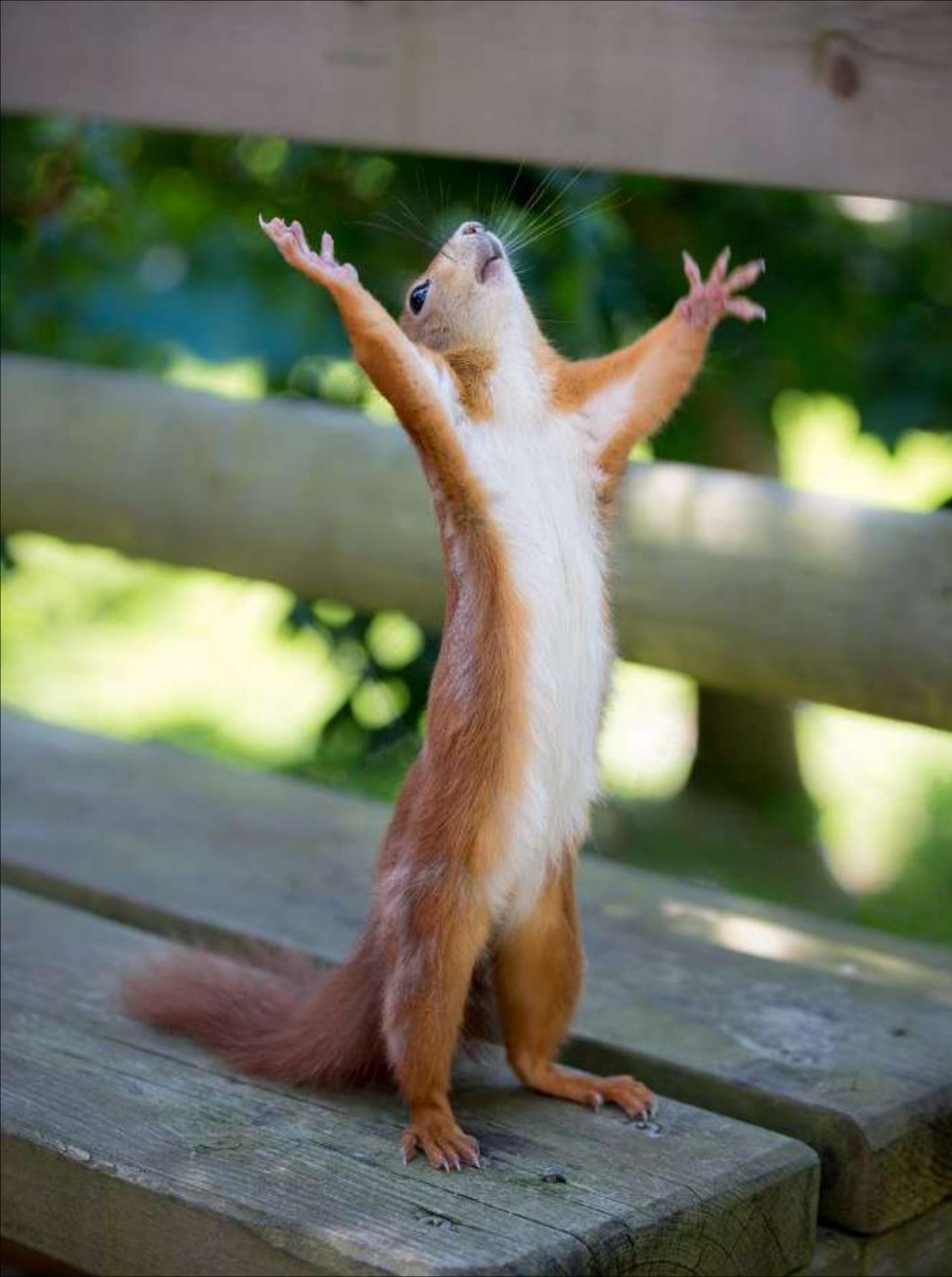
# EXAMPLE

## CAR MAINTENANCE BLOG... \*YAWN\*

"Here's how you change a fan belt..."

"Many years ago, my uncle Geoffrey's fan belt tore while he was on his way to a first date. He had to change it on the way to the date and arrived covered in engine oil..."

**Question: What story elements have made this more interesting?**



# STORY ELEMENTS

- ▶ **Character \***
- ▶ **Emotion**
- ▶ **Visual**

**Activity:** Add a quick story to the beginning of your idea

## EMOTION

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**"STORIES MEAN EMOTION AND EMOTION MEANS DEEPLY ENGRAVING THE LESSON INTO YOUR READER'S BRAIN"**

- ▶ Emotion is how we connect. Emotion is what makes us human.
- ▶ We experience something of life without having to live it e.g. soap operas
- ▶ Emotion can be in the way you write or the things you choose to write about.

**Activity:** Make your story a bit more soap opera



MAKE IT

# VISUAL

PART 1

# EXAMPLE

## CHRISTINA'S WRITING ON A MOMENT OF BELONGING

"I vividly remember a time at university when some friends and I got together to have a Latin American party. We cooked spicy chicken fajitas together, which we then all devoured with our hands, sauce dripping everywhere. We washed up and cleaned together then sat around eating cake and chatting and laughing over salsa music in the background. Some people were demonstrating their salsa moves in the corner, some were having a good time playing board games. I remember that evening really clearly even though it was a while ago, because I remember the feeling of pure joy and the sense that everyone present was an important, valued and welcome part of that group."

▶ Picture

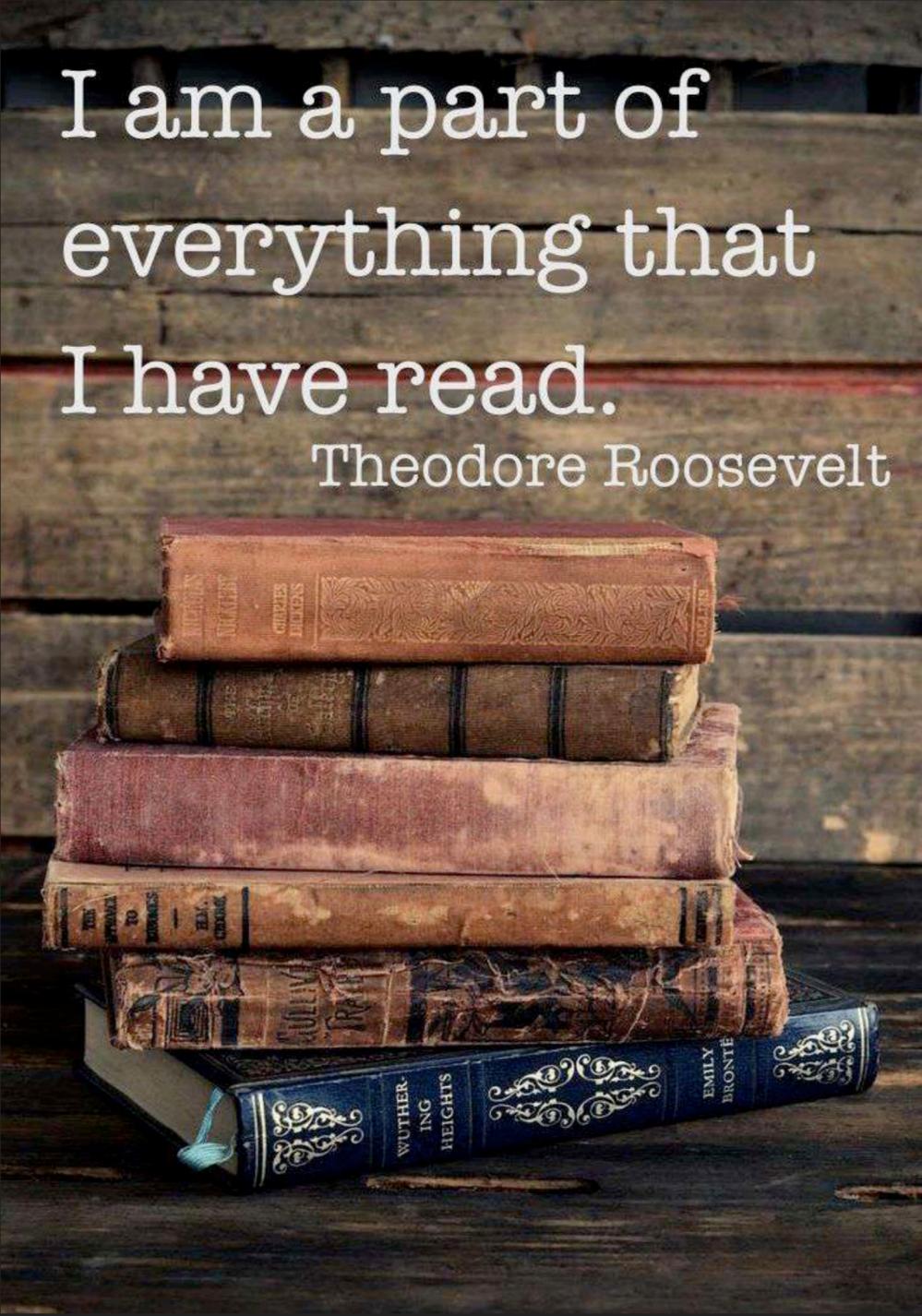
▶ Symbol

▶ ALL senses!

▶ Verbs/action

## THE JOY OF 'BRAIN MOVIES'...

- ▶ Reading requires the active imaginative input from the reader. The reader actually helps create the story.
- ▶ Personal investment: a reader is not given the pictures, a reader needs to be given the tools to create them him/herself.
- ▶ Creating a 'spell of engagement' or sense of 'being lost in a story' is fundamental to good writing.



I am a part of  
everything that  
I have read.

Theodore Roosevelt

MAKE IT

# VISUAL

PART 2

# AESTHETICS MATTER

Use...

- ▶ Images
- ▶ Headings and sub-headings
- ▶ Indents
- ▶ Bullet points
- ▶ Quotes
- ▶ Lists
- ▶ Broken up

Particularly when writing for the web

**Activity:** Add 1 or 2 things from this list into your story

## COMPASSION FATIGUE AND HOMELESSNESS IN THE CITY

FIONA HANDSCOME



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### Compassion Fatigue and Homelessness in the City

THE CHURCH OF ENGLAND - BIRMINGHAM - FRIDAY, DECEMBER 18, 2015 - 104 Reads

Today, I am running the gauntlet from train station to office armed only with £3 and an apple. Immediately I know that this is foolish.

As soon as I exit Moore Street, there's a man huddled on the floor with a cardboard sign that begins: "Sorry if I offend..." which kills me. Instinctively I reach for my purse, but remember that giving money to those begging is unhelpful, more often than not [?]. My hand falls onto the apple, which I offer apologetically to the man. He takes it and I walk on.

Five seconds later I am wondering whether even giving an apple is a good idea... Doesn't this sort of thing perpetuate begging on the streets? Now racked with guilt, I turn back and see the man chomping away at the apple. I can't exactly request that he returns it. The pretty sure that taking food from a homeless person would make me the worst person in the world... I walk on, metaphorically slapping my own wrists.



There's a man huddled on the floor with a cardboard sign...

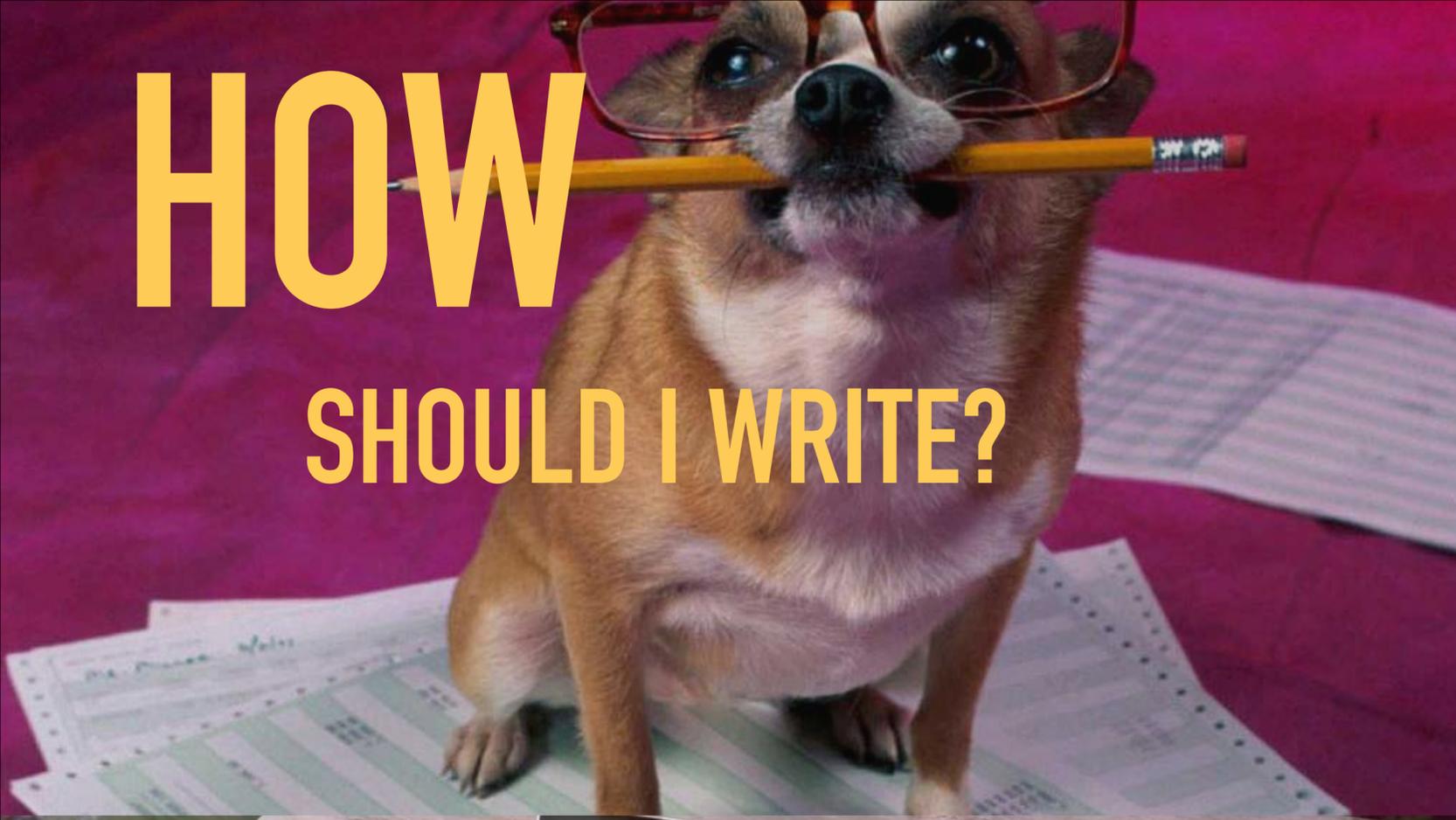
The £3 burrs a hole in my purse.

Ahead, a Big Issue seller comes into view. I breathe a sigh of relief - I know what to do here. I approach him, hand over my £3, get my change, the magazine and briefly pass the time of day. But then, as I approach the office I see another Big Issue seller. Kats. No more cash. But what if his situation is worse than the other seller's? Maybe he is more deserving? Is it up to me to decide who is more deserving? How would I know?

Just a few metres on is another rough sleeper, crunched in a doorway. I've already lost my apple. The £3 that I probably shouldn't give burrs a hole in my purse, I walk past and smile warmly at him, hoping that somehow this will magically commemorate my benevolent intentions. I am, perversely, ignoring him because I care about him. My smile probably looks more like some kind of smug leer. I am a terrible person. I continue.

I don't know.



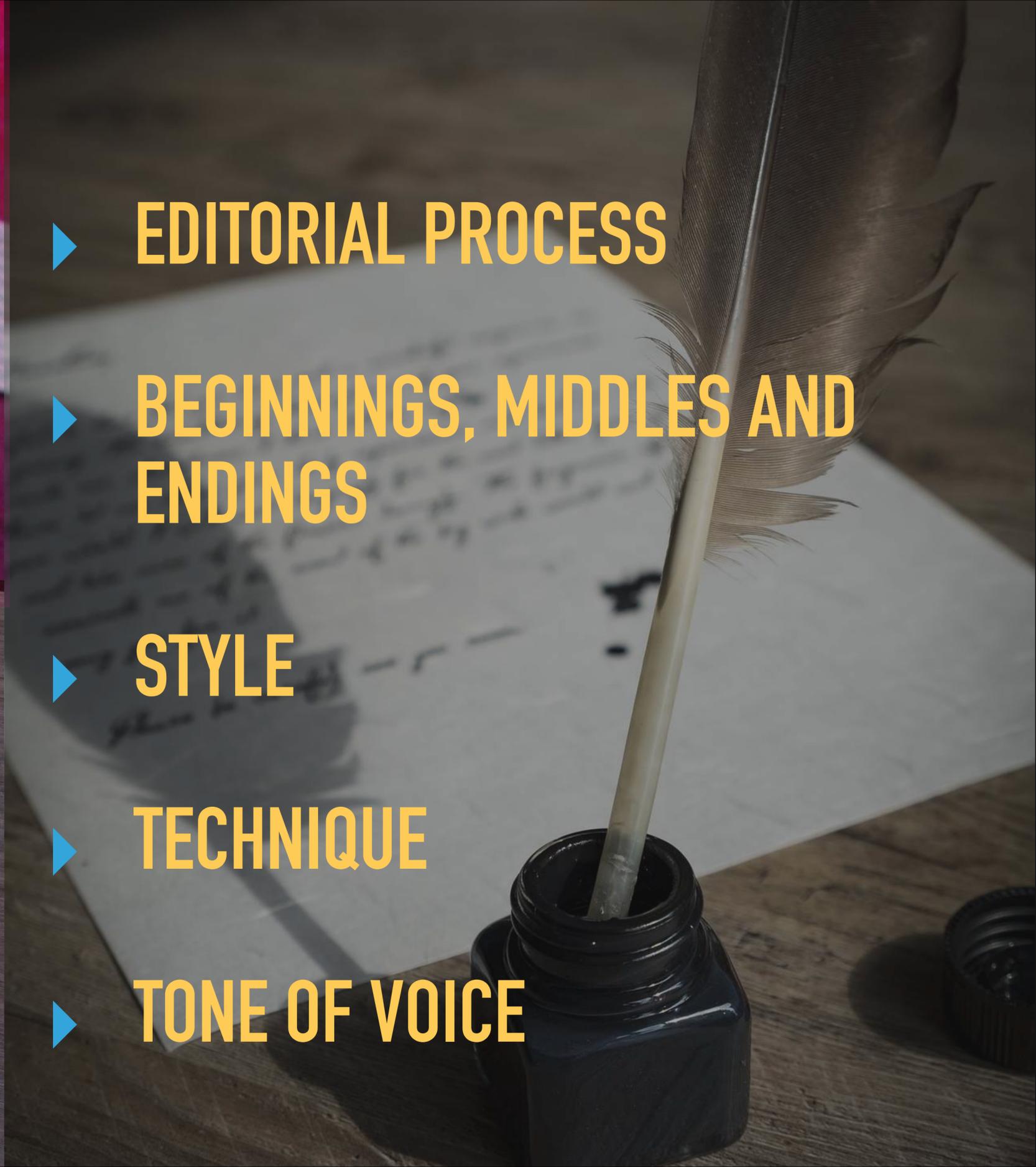


# HOW

SHOULD I WRITE?



# THREE BIG QUESTIONS...

- 
- ▶ EDITORIAL PROCESS
  - ▶ BEGINNINGS, MIDDLES AND ENDINGS
  - ▶ STYLE
  - ▶ TECHNIQUE
  - ▶ TONE OF VOICE

# EDIT, EDIT, EDIT

- ▶ But first... Don't edit!
- ▶ Then do edit.
- ▶ Then edit again.
- ▶ If you don't have an editor (or Edit Bunny) leave it for a while then go back to it.
- ▶ Take out everything unnecessary - not just a matter of word count, but a matter of impact
- ▶ Word count doesn't matter (\*gasp\*!)



# BEGINNINGS

- ▶ Headlines matter
- ▶ Draw people in
- ▶ Use story
- ▶ Spell it out
- ▶ Write the first paragraph last?

# MIDDLES

- ▶ Say it as briefly as you can
- ▶ Write in a way that comes naturally
- ▶ Write visually
- ▶ Use verbs

# ENDINGS

- ▶ Think about what you want your reader to go away with
- ▶ A call to action
- ▶ End with a question to elicit comments
- ▶ Have you encouraged change?

# THE IMPORTANCE OF BEING ORIGINAL

"Perhaps the best lesson that I ever learned as a blogger was that people are drawn to others who speak their mind, who have something unique to say and who say it in a creative and fresh way. Say what everyone else is saying in the same way that everyone else is saying it and you're almost guaranteed of being largely ignored."

<https://probblogger.com/how-to-write-excellent-blog-content-what-we-wish-we-knew/>



## BE YOURSELF

- ▶ Write in a way that comes naturally
- ▶ Your perspective is important
- ▶ Inject a bit of personality
- ▶ Be original
- ▶ Be honest\*
- ▶ If you're writing on behalf of e.g. an organisation, find the crossovers (where your personality and that of the organisation meet).



## "THE PLAIN ENGLISH RULE

Avoid jargon. Say what you see. Don't dress things up too much.

## "THE CONVERSATIONAL TONE RULE

Not so much a rule as an affliction. I basically write as I think / talk. I think that's ok for blogs, and maybe OK full stop.

## "THE HUMOUR RULE

Sometimes it may not be appropriate, but a little light humour can work wonders, especially when dealing with seemingly dry subject matter.

## "THE PERSONALITY RULE

It is essential to define your own voice and to allow the reader to get to know you a little bit. It's a noisy world out there and I prefer to read articles with a bit of verve, rather than straight-down-the-middle news reporting. Try to stand out from the crowd. Dare to be different. Show a little leg... Whatever it takes..."

**Activity:** Tell the other people on your table the idea that you've written down. Note the differences.

<https://econsultancy.com/blog/6771-how-to-write-for-the-web-23-useful-rules/>



# TECH STUFF

## Blogging platforms

- ▶ Wordpress
- ▶ Blogger
- ▶ Tumblr
- ▶ Medium
- ▶ Weebly

# 34 BEST TOOLS TO IMPROVE YOUR WRITING

- ▶ Daily Page
- ▶ 750 Words
- ▶ Twords
- ▶ Your Own "Swipe File"
- ▶ Help me Write
- ▶ Blog Topic Generator
- ▶ Trello
- ▶ Google Docs
- ▶ Quora
- ▶ inbound.org
- ▶ Blog Post Templates & Ebook Templates
- ▶ HubSpot Composer
- ▶ oTranscribe
- ▶ Coffitivity
- ▶ E.ggtimer.com
- ▶ Tomato Timer
- ▶ Zen Pen
- ▶ Power Thesaurus
- ▶ Thesaurus.com
- ▶ OneLook Thesaurus
- ▶ Twinword Writer
- ▶ Prompts
- ▶ BrainyQuote
- ▶ Hemingway App
- ▶ Atomic Writer
- ▶ ProWritingAid
- ▶ Grammarly
- ▶ Correctica
- ▶ Draft
- ▶ Cliché Finder
- ▶ Listly
- ▶ Style Guide
- ▶ WritePls



<https://blog.hubspot.com/marketing/improving-writing-skills-tools>

A hand holding a pen over a document, with a dark overlay and yellow text.

[WWW.WRITERSDIGEST.COM](http://WWW.WRITERSDIGEST.COM)

[PROBLOGGER.COM](http://PROBLOGGER.COM)

[WWW.BLOGGINGBASICS101.COM](http://WWW.BLOGGINGBASICS101.COM)

[SMARTBLOGGER.COM](http://SMARTBLOGGER.COM)

## A Step-By-Step Checklist

IS THE CONTENT:

### Findable

Can the user find the content?

DOES THE CONTENT INCLUDE:

- An h1 tag
- At least two h2 tags
- Metadata, including title, descriptors & keywords
- Links to other related content
- Alt tags for images

### Readable

Can the user read the content?

- An inverted pyramid writing style
- Chunking
- Bullets
- Numbered lists
- Following the style guide

### Understandable

Can the user understand the content?

- An appropriate content type (text, video, etc.)
- Reflection that you considered the user personas
- Context
- Respect for the audience's reading level
- Articulate an old idea in a new way

### Actionable

Will the user want to take action?

- A call to action
- A place to comment
- An invitation to share
- Links to related content
- A direct summary of what to do

### Shareable

Will the user share the content?

- Something to provoke an emotional response
- A reason to share
- An ask to share
- An easy way to share
- Personalization (add hashtags to tweets, etc.)

# CONTENT CHECK LIST

Ahava Leibtag

[http://contentmarketinginstitute.com/wp-content/uploads/2011/04/leibtag\\_content\\_checklist.pdf](http://contentmarketinginstitute.com/wp-content/uploads/2011/04/leibtag_content_checklist.pdf)

Also, see: <http://www.melyssagriffin.com/17-things-you-should-do-to-every-blog-post-before-after-you-hit-publish>

A low-angle shot of several alpacas looking upwards against a bright blue sky with a faint rainbow. The alpacas are of various shades of brown and tan. The text 'THE END' is overlaid in large, bold, yellow letters in the upper right quadrant, and 'Thank you!' is overlaid in a smaller, bold, yellow font in the middle left area.

**THE END**

**Thank you!**