

Bad writing

This is a short rogues' gallery of bad practice. It is short because we don't want to dwell on negative examples, but it exists to offer a few warnings and to explain how problems are often caused. Most of the items have been mentioned elsewhere in advice on what to avoid, or cautions of one kind or another. I think they are worth second mention in a different context.

What are the most common causes of bad writing? Well, some people are just not used to expressing themselves on paper at all, and can't be expected to write fluently. Apart from that however, the following bad habits and misunderstandings cause the most problems. They are not in any particular order. Some people may be stuck with just one of these weaknesses. In the worst cases they may be suffering with more than one.

- Using speech patterns in writing
- Poor control of punctuation
- Weak grammar and syntax
- Sentences too long
- Unrelated clauses
- Jumbled vocabulary
- Straining to impress
- Mired in cliché

Using speech patterns

When we speak to each other, we don't use grammatically complete sentences, careful constructions, and beautifully modulated syntax. Our utterances are often quite ungrammatical, abbreviated, and incomplete. We might **say** *She wasn't there at home, it'll be later when I'm going to call*: this would be acceptable in speech. But we would **write** *She was not at home, so I will call again later*. If these habits of speech are carried over into the written language the results are usually not very good. Remember that on the page we do not have any of the other parts of spoken communication to guide us: tone of voice, accent, stress, and facial expression are absent. The two forms of communication may both use words as their basic element, but they are two different 'codes'.