

# Best Writing Tactics for Low-Watt Brains

***Steven R. Van Hook, PhD***  
***Top Communication Tips***

# Abstract & Bio



*Steven R. Van Hook, PhD*

## **Topic: Writing for Low-Watt Brains**

**Abstract:** The human brain runs on less wattage than it takes to light a refrigerator bulb. Thus we must streamline our tactics for simpler yet more powerful writing. This presentation shares many immediate tips to better connect your words to the hearts and minds of others.

**Bio:** *Steven R. Van Hook teaches communications and cross-cultural relations for the University of California and elsewhere. He's been a newspaper columnist, TV news anchor, and bureau chief in Moscow. He has a PhD specializing in transcultural education, and has published in journals including UNESCO's Prospects and Sage's Journal of Research in International Education.*

## **Audience Comments**

*'An excellent talk – thank you so much!'*

*'Managers need training to do this well.'*

*'It was a terrifically interesting talk!'*

*'This applies to grant proposals, too!'*

*'Everyone enjoyed – awesome class!'*

# University Faculty

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- **Steven R. Van Hook, PhD**
- Global business/MBA/communication courses for UCLA, UC Santa Barbara, California Lutheran University, National University, Antioch University ...

- <http://wwmr.us>
- <http://clu.wwmr.us>
- [steven@wwmr.us](mailto:steven@wwmr.us)

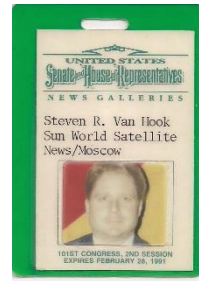


# Steve Van Hook

## :: Media Samples ::



**TV Anchor**  
Circa 1987



**Russia TV Bureau Chief**  
Circa 1990



**Radio Reporter**  
Circa 1985



**Newspaper Writer**  
1980s –



# Nonprofit / Government Work

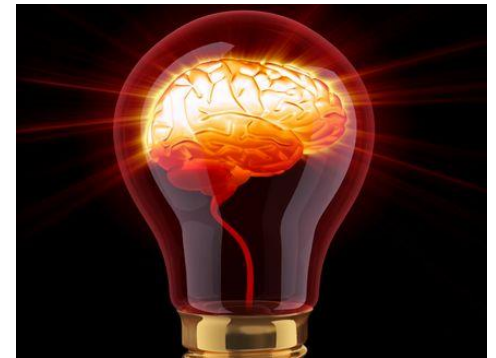
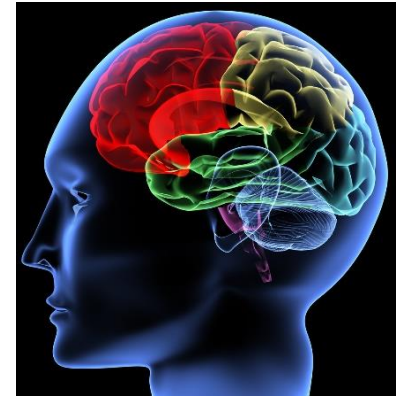
- VISTA
- USAID
- UNESCO
- Head Start
- IREX
- Educare Research
- Crisis Counselor
- Saylor Foundation
- Corrections Intake





# Our Low-Watt Brains

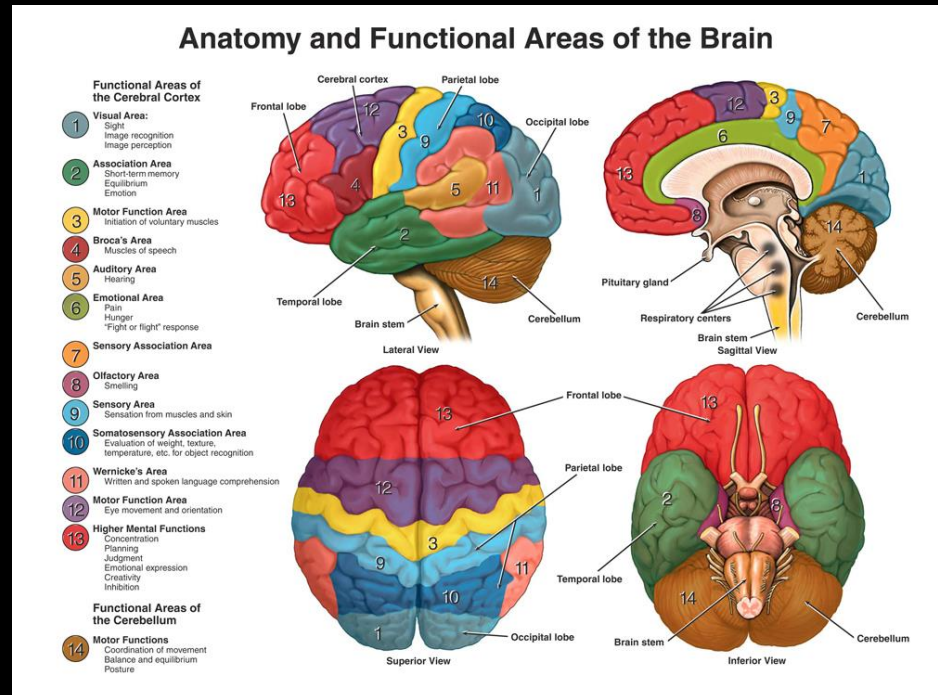
- Human brain runs on only 12-watts
- Minimize demands for attention and focus
- Reduce drain on brains with brevity, simplicity, resonant messages; maximum return for minimized effort





# Cortical Homunculus Mapper: Motor & Sensory allocations

Article



# 8<sup>th</sup> Grade Writing Level

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- Don't write \*like\* an 8<sup>th</sup> grader; write \*for\* an 8<sup>th</sup> grader
- One syllable words ideal; no more than three ('use' instead of 'utilize')
- Keep sentences short; use bullet items
- Use smaller paragraphs (4 sentences instead 8)



***Tip: Turn on MS Word 'readability statistics' option in proofing settings to activate Flesch-Kincaid Grade Level assessment***

**Article**



# Appeals for Winning Attention

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1. Security
2. Possessions
3. Imitate Others
4. Good Health
5. Sexual and Romantic Drives
6. Curiosity
7. Beauty
8. Play and Relaxation
9. Feel Important
10. Physical Pleasure
11. Love
12. Avoid Discomforts



<http://ucla.wwmr.us>

# Transculturally Dissonant Messages:

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## *What Doesn't Work Well*

- Humor
- Sex
- Religion
- Politics



# Transcultural Themes & Images

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- Babies & Children
- Pets & Animals
- Sports
- Love, Marriage,  
Relationship Conflicts
- Self-image
- The Birth-Life-Death  
Cycle
- Water



# Best Speaking Speed

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- Between 140-180 words per minute best speed for listener attention and retention
- About 3 words per second (“from now to now”)
- 40 words in 15 seconds
- Slower speed for impact; faster speed for urgency



*Do not be untruthful, but also don't feel the need to be hurtful. Do not say someone looks unwell, sick, or tired. This will do nothing to further conversation and only make the person uncomfortable. Remember silence is an option.*

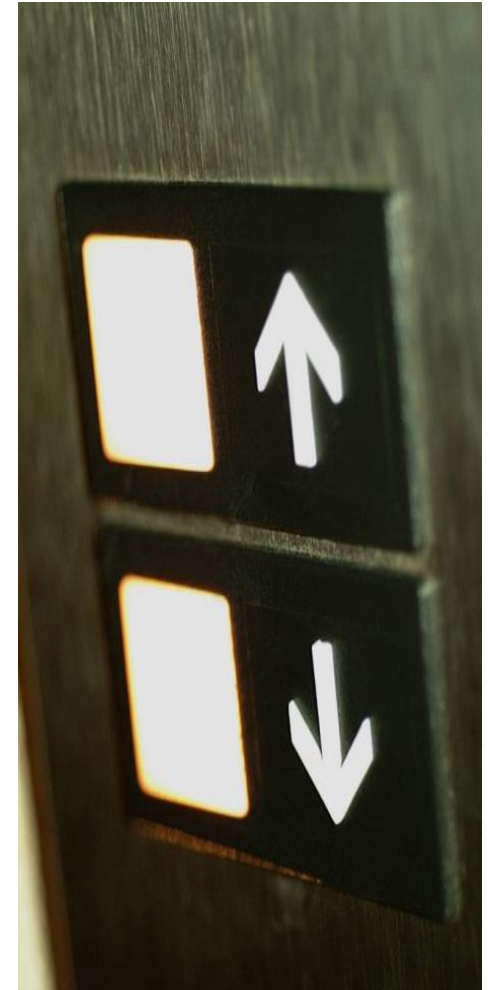
(40 words / ~15 seconds)

# The Elevator Speech: Simplify Your Message

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## Prepare Your Own Low-Watt Brain for 30-60 seconds on:

- **Job search:**  
*I'm looking for a position that ...*
- **Research overview:**  
*I'm looking for funding ...*
- **Personal background:**  
*I've been ... I am ...*
- **Life goals:**  
*It's important to me to become ...*
- **Philosophical belief:**  
*I believe that ...*





# The Pieces

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## Succinct 3-4 talking points:

- Who I am
- What I've done
- What I offer
- How it can help you



# Sample Pitch

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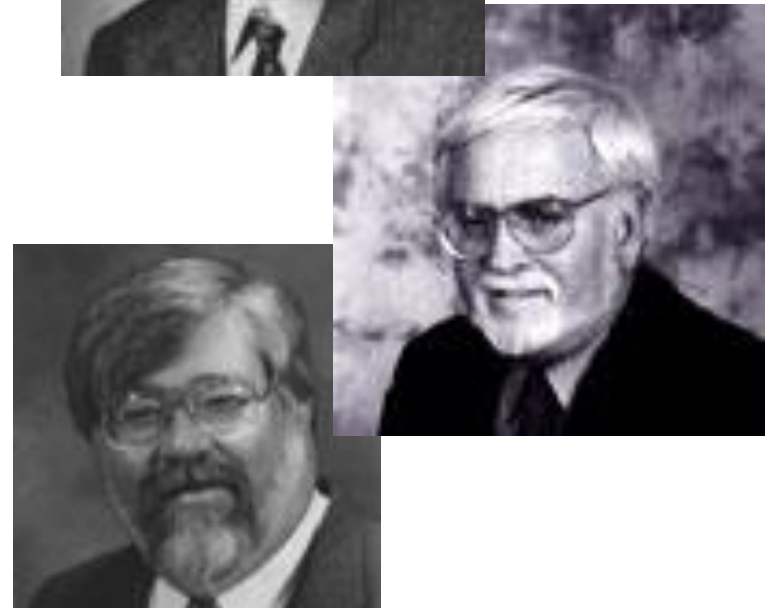
- My name is Steve. I've been an international educator and a journalist for more than 25 years. I've taught for UCSB and UCLA, and I was a television bureau chief in Moscow covering the final months of the Soviet Union. Mostly what I do in both education and journalism is to try to reduce complicated issues to simple terms that everyone can understand. My doctorate and research is in transcultural communications. That means I try to find ways to help you connect across cultures with your audience wherever you may be in the world.

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# Best Business Writing Tips

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- Effective business writing program developed by the University of Chicago Graduate School of Business.
- Courses taught through Cardean University and New York Institute of Technology MBA program.



# 1) Use Resonant Characters

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- Use lead characters as nouns familiar to your readers. Let those characters tell the story, woven throughout your writing.
- *Managers, Workers*
- *Teachers, Students*
- *Customers, Clients*
- **Wrong:** *Professional advancement is achieved through hard work.*
- **Right:** ...



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- *Managers, Workers*
- *Teachers, Students*
- *Customers, Clients*
- **Wrong:** *Professional advancement is achieved through hard work.*
- **Right:** *Managers achieve success through hard work.*





## 2) Engage Action Verbs

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- Use strong, active, visual verbs to propel your writing and readers along.
- **Wrong:** *The memo **is** written well.*
- **Right:** ...



## 2) Engage Action Verbs

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- Use strong, active, visual verbs to propel your writing and readers along.
- **Wrong:** *The memo **is** written well.*
- **Right:** *The manager **crafted** the memo with resonant characters and strong verbs.*



### 3) Perform The 8-Word Test

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- Keep your noun and verb within 8 words of each other.
- **Wrong:** *The **manager** responsible for the daily assignments and worker allocation charts in our department **is** sick today.*  
(13 words)
- **Right:** ...



### 3) Perform The 8-Word Test

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- Keep your noun and verb within 8 words of each other.
- **Wrong:** *The **manager** responsible for the daily assignments and worker allocation charts in our department **is** sick today.*  
(13 words)
- **Right:** *Our **department manager** **called** in sick today, so we are missing the daily assignments on the worker allocation charts.*



## 4) Link with Explicit Connectors

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- Link complex sentences and phrases with connectors to help your reader navigate through the text.
- **Wrong:** *The manager didn't treat the workers well. Workers were poorly motivated and often quit.*
- **Right:** ...





## 4) Link with Explicit Connectors

---

- Link complex sentences and phrases with connectors to help your reader navigate through the text.
- **Wrong:** *The manager didn't treat the workers well. Workers were poorly motivated and often quit.*
- **Right:** *The manager mistreated the workers. **Because of that**, the workers suffered from poor motivation and often quit.*



# 5) Lead Your Readers From Old to New

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- Establish common ground in your message development, leading your readers from comfortable familiar territory to the new.
- **Wrong:** *We will mix the new formula with the following steps. This will modify our old procedures.*
- **Right:** ...



## 5) Lead Your Readers From Old to New

---

- Establish common ground in your message development, leading your readers from comfortable familiar territory to the new.
- **Wrong:** *We will mix the new formula with the following steps. This will modify our old procedures.*
- **Right:** *Our existing protocol calls for mixing the formula with established procedures. The new method will improve upon that in the following ways ...*



## 6) Problem/Solution/Action Paradigm

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- **Frame the problem:**  
*We are losing valuable workers.*
- **Pose a Solution:**  
*Let's create a worker retention program.*
- **Call to Action:**  
*Let's hire a consultancy for manager training next month.*



# Top 6 Communication Tips

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- 1) Use Resonant Characters
- 2) Engage Action Verbs
- 3) Perform the 8-Word Test between Nouns & Verbs
- 4) Link Sentences & Phrases with Explicit Connectors
- 5) Lead Your Readers From Old to New Information
- 6) Craft a Problem/Solution/Action Paradigm





# Revise This Example:

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- **Wrong:** *Developmental success for everyone within an organization from top to bottom and all steps in between is ensured when good work is encouraged among the front-line people. Those responsible for leadership will get more loyalty and harder work from their team members if they treat them well.*
- **Right: ...**



# Revise This Example:

---

- **Wrong:** *Developmental success for everyone within an organization from top to bottom and all steps in between is ensured when good work is encouraged among the front-line people. Those responsible for leadership will get more loyalty and harder work from their team members if they treat them well.*
- **Right:** *Our company's success is important to us all. Unfortunately, we have a costly turnover of valuable workers. However our managers can remedy this by recognizing, respecting, and rewarding the good efforts of our workers. Such responsive managers may win the loyalty and best efforts of our teams. Therefore we should hire a consultant for managerial training.*

# Again: Top 6 Communication Tips

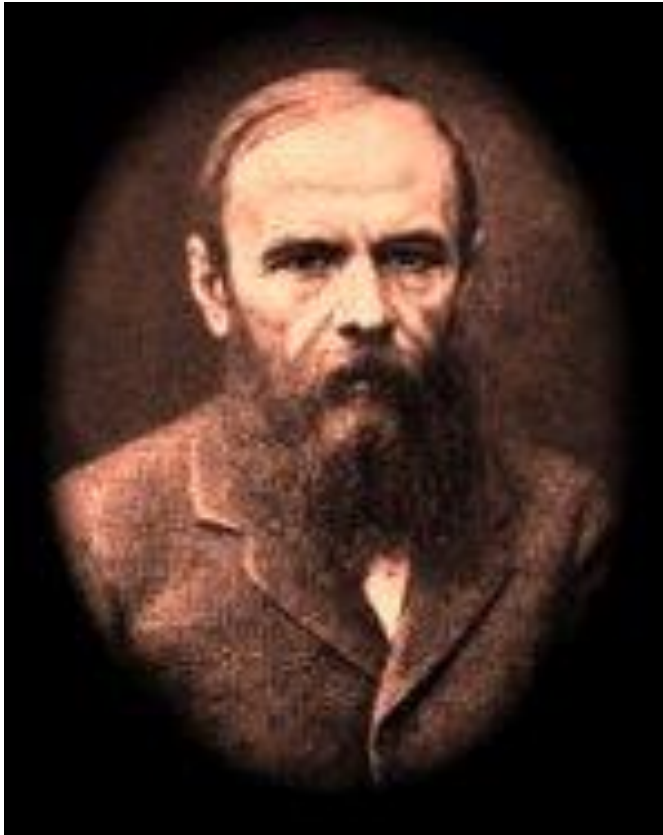
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- 6) Craft a Problem/Solution/  
Action Paradigm



# Fyodor Dostoevsky

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*“If people around you  
will not hear you,  
fall down before  
them and beg their  
forgiveness, for in  
truth you are to  
blame.”*

# *Harriet Beecher Stowe*

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“There is one thing that every individual can do – they can see to it that they feel right.

***An atmosphere of sympathetic influence encircles every human being;***

and the man or woman who feels strongly, healthily and justly, on the great interests of humanity, is a constant benefactor to the human race. See, then, to your sympathies in this matter!”

- *Uncle Tom's Cabin*, 1852



# Resources & References

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- **Materials & Videos:**  
<http://ucla.wwmr.us>
- **YouTube Channel:**  
<http://youtube.com/srvanhook>
- **Transcultural Research:**  
<http://wwmr.us>





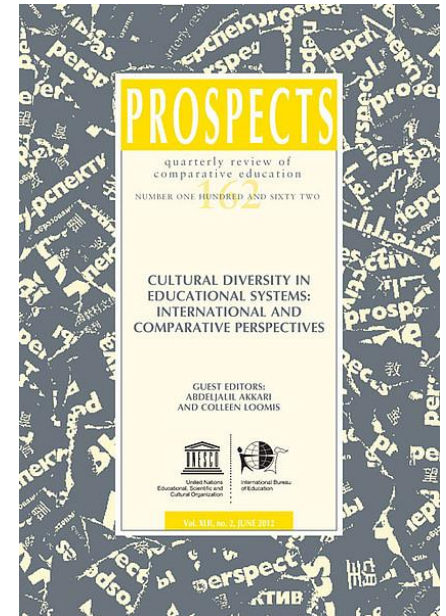
# Articles on Transcultural Learning

## ■ *UNESCO Journal “Prospects”*

Van Hook, S.R. (2012, June).

Hopes and hazards of transculturalism.

[Article](#)



## ■ *Journal of Research in International Education*

Van Hook, S.R. (2011, April).

Modes and models for transcending cultural differences in international classrooms.

[Article](#)



# Questions? Comments?

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**Steven R. Van Hook, PhD**

- **University of California**  
*Language, Culture  
& Business Programs*
- **Educare Research inc**  
*Nonprofit International  
Educational Resources*
- **Second Life: Educare**  
*Learning Centers*
- <http://educares.net>
- <http://wwmr.us>
- <http://ucla.wwmr.us>
- [steven@wwmr.us](mailto:steven@wwmr.us)

