

Writing for Low-Watt Brains in the Age of AI

The Science Circle

Steven R. Van Hook, PhD

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Abstract & Bio



Steven R. Van Hook, PhD

Research Website
<http://wwmr.us>



Topic: Writing for Low-Watt Brains in the Age of AI

Abstract: Now we know just how huge and hungry artificially powered intelligence will be. The human brain runs on less wattage than it takes to light a refrigerator bulb. We human-sourced communicators must streamline our tactics for simpler yet more powerful writing to stay relevant. This presentation shares many immediate tips to better connect your words to the hearts and minds of others, as the human touch becomes a scarcer and richer skill.

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*, Sage's *Journal of Research in International Education*, and UWG's *Journal of Distance Learning Administration*.

University Faculty



- **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>
- steven@wwmr.us



UC SANTA BARBARA
UNIVERSITY OF CALIFORNIA

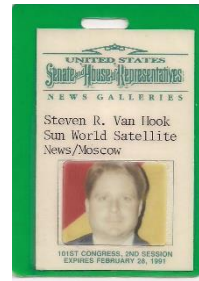
California Lutheran University

Steve Van Hook

:: Media Samples ::



TV Anchor
Circa 1987



Russia TV Bureau Chief
Circa 1990



Newspaper Writer
1980s –



Radio Reporter
Circa 1985



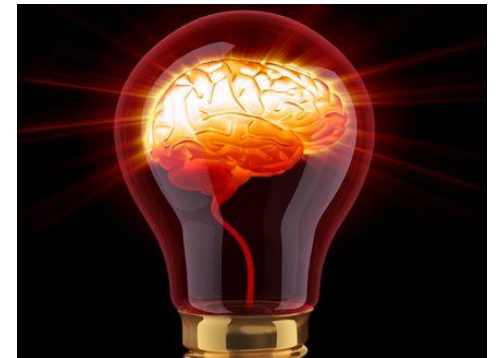
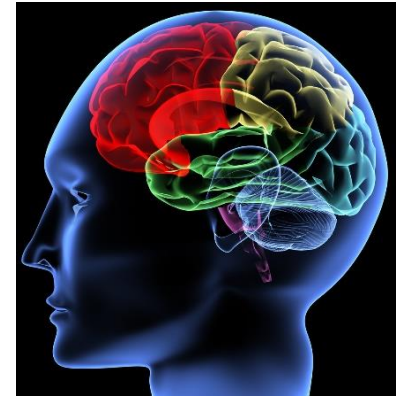
Nonprofit / Government Work

- 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



8th Grade Writing Level

- Don't write *like* an 8th grader; write *for* an 8th 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

Simple Writing Gets Big Response



to emails written
at a kindergarten
reading level



to emails written
at a 3rd grade
reading level



to emails written
at a high school
reading level



to emails written at
a college reading
level

Appeals for Winning Attention

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



[Video](#)



Brain's Negative Bias

Our Brain's Negative Bias

- Brain built more attentive and sensitive to unpleasant news, keeping us out of harm's way
- Negative bias exploited by news, politics, interpersonal relations
- Small positive acts to counter negative in life spheres:
'Magic' ratio of 5-to-1

From ***Psychology Today***
by Hara Estroff Marano

[Local File](#)

Don't Be So Hard on Yourself

- Negative bias self-criticism harms self, interfering with productivity

Negative bias hacks:

1. Practice self-compassion
2. Meet your self-criticism with same kindness offered others
3. Reduce ratio to x and y:
Make immediate contrast between *feelings of self-criticism* and *letting it go*. Brain will choose the less painful.

From ***New York Times***
by Charolette Lieberman

[Local File](#)

Transculturally Dissonant Messages:

What Doesn't Work Well

- Humor
- Sex
- Religion
- Politics



[Video](#)

Transcultural Themes & Images

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



[Video](#)

Best Speaking Speed

- 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

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 ...

[Video](#)



The Pieces

Succinct 3-4 talking points:

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



Sample Pitch



- 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.

(:40)

Best Business Writing Tips

- 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.



[Video](#)

1) Use Resonant Characters

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



2) Engage Action Verbs

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



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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

- 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

- 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

- 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

- 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

- **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

- 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:

- **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:

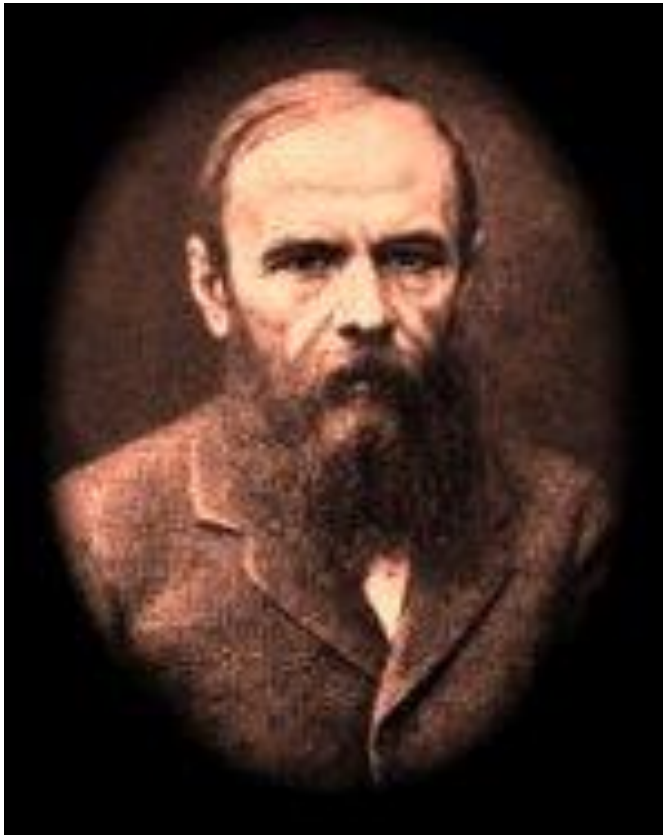
- **Wrong:** *Developmental success for everyone within an organization from top to bottom and all steps in between is ensured when good work is encouraged among the front-line people. Those responsible for leadership will get more loyalty and harder work from their team members if they treat them well.*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

- 1) Use Resonant Characters
- 2) Engage Action Verbs
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between Nouns & Verbs
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Fyodor Dostoevsky



*“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

“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

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



Articles on Transcultural Learning

Journal of Distance Learning Administration **(University of West Georgia)**

Van Hook, S.R. (2018, Spring)
The future revisited: Can global learning still save the world?

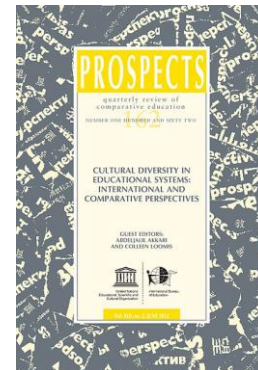


[Article](#)

[Local File](#)

UNESCO Journal “Prospects”

Van Hook, S.R. (2012, June)
Hopes and hazards of transculturalism



[Article](#)

[Local File](#)

Journal of Research in International Education (Sage)

Van Hook, S.R. (2011, April)
Modes and models for transcending cultural differences in international classrooms.



[Article](#)

[Local File](#)

Questions? Comments?

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

