

## *Yeah, write*

AT THE FAMILY DINNER TABLE, and in school corridors, and even around the office water cooler, one sometimes hears the remark, “My teacher [“boss,” “editor,” “girlfriend”] *just doesn’t like my writing style.*” Yada-yada-yada.

Think again, Sparky! Some writers have style. Some don’t. You don’t, not yet, but help is on the way because here’s *How to Write*. Your parents would not have given you this guide to good writing had they not seen your sparks of genius. Your teacher would not have asked you to read it if you were beyond hope. Your boss would not have supplied you with an office copy if she thought you could not learn how to communicate.

In any professional field—education, law, medicine, journalism, commerce, the arts—those individuals who best succeed are those who are best able to express themselves. Okay, not always—some U.S. presidents cannot speak or write, and many supermodels have no need—but if you lack the party machinery or family connections to propel you into the White House, and if God has neglected to give you a body fit for the cover of *Cosmo* or *Planet Muscle*, then your next best bet is to use words and to use them well. Learn to say what you’ve got to say as it needs to be said. All the rest (an A+ in English 101, a desk job, a promotion, a good-looking lover, a Jaguar, a Nobel Prize for Literature) is then just icing on the cake.

Writing ability is not a “gift.” You have to work for it. No one comes out of the womb discoursing wonders, or explicating *Hamlet*, or even telling a well-crafted joke. Babies are born, they want to be heard, they squawk. Intelligible speech comes with observation and practice—without which, those inarticulate cries will soon become tiresome even to the ears of a doting mother, and ineffectual as well for the child who does the squawking. Composition, like speech, is an activity that can be learned, with time, attention, and practice, by virtually anyone. But no one can develop facility in writing without a thoughtful commitment to excellence. The English language is a wonderful instrument. *How to Write* is your user’s manual. Read it. Study it. Take it to heart until you can recite whole chapters in your sleep. It’s time, kiddo, to spread your wings and fly. It doesn’t take a literary genius (or a scholar, journalist, or secretary) to write well. You may be a high school football lineman who doesn’t know his nouns from his verbs, or his *like* from his *as*, or his *nevertheless* from his *but*. Not to worry. You, too, can learn to write like an angel—clearly, correctly, concisely, and creatively—but only if you give a damn.

—A.E.