

# How to Improve Your Writing Without Writing a Word

By Walter Burek

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Many an ad, business letter and TV commercial comes into being slowly, even painfully. Maybe because some of us write as if we were still using an IBM Selectric, wite-out and a badly worn Webster's. For that matter, maybe some still are. And that's OK.

But in these digital days, software and the Internet can help a tech-savvy writer be a better writer and make getting the job done easier. While writing every day is still the best practice for improving your writing skills, there are programs and Web sites available today that can really help your writing along.

Here are 18 digital tools you can use to research, brainstorm, organize, compose, communicate and bring out the better writer in you.

## Wordsmithing Grammar and Style

Cliché Finder. You've always been told to "avoid clichés like the plague." But sometimes there's no other way to write or talk your way out of a sticky situation. This site lets you search for just the right cliché, by entries that include a specific word. | [www.westegg.com/cliche](http://www.westegg.com/cliche) |

Common Errors in English. This is a useful list of words often misused. Plus an interesting list of usages people keep telling you are wrong but which are actually standard in English. Links to other grammar resources as well.

| [www.wsu.edu/%7Ebrians/errors/errors.html](http://www.wsu.edu/%7Ebrians/errors/errors.html) |

Dictionary of Difficult Words. Do you aim to become a member of the literati, or do you wish to be a savant? Do you want to avoid being verbigerative and be succinct instead? Search this list of over 13,900 difficult words to increase your vocabulary or just find out what those words really mean. | [www.tiscali.co.uk/reference/dictionaries/difficultwords](http://www.tiscali.co.uk/reference/dictionaries/difficultwords) |

fun-with-words.com. Everything you want to know about amusing quirks, peculiarities, and oddities of the English language. Stuff like palindromes, spoonerisms, oxymora, and more. |

[www.fun-with-words.com](http://www.fun-with-words.com) |

Word Play. A list of links to dictionaries, foreign language translations, word games and wacky sites like The Apostrophe Protection Society, Burma Shave Signs, The Country & Western Song Generator and The Klingon Language

Institute. | [www.wolinskyweb.com/word.htm](http://www.wolinskyweb.com/word.htm) |

The Word Spy. This site is devoted to recently coined words and phrases, old words that are being used in new ways, and existing words that have enjoyed a recent renaissance. | [www.wordspy.com](http://www.wordspy.com)

Word Menu. This software version of Random House's printed Word Menu blends all the best features of a dictionary, thesaurus and encyclopedia into one-easy-to-use reference. Words are organized by subject rather than alphabetically. Windows and Mac. Available from [www.wordmenu.com](http://www.wordmenu.com).

WordDog Plain English Editor. Add this program to your Microsoft Word app and it will sniff out ambiguous words, verbose phrases, redundancies and overworked phrases. Windows only. Available from [www.worddog.com](http://www.worddog.com).

## Reference

All Experts. If you can't find the info you need in this enormous archive of free Q&A, send your question to an expert of your choice (also free.) | [www.allexperts.com](http://www.allexperts.com) |

Bartelby.com. The perfect site to search for a Shakespeare quote, fact-check a line from a great classic, or look something up in Gray's Anatomy. Unrestricted access to reference, verse, fiction and nonfiction books. | [www.bartleby.com](http://www.bartleby.com) |

How Stuff Works. Want to know how those traveling lawn sprinklers work? Or how to clone a sheep? Or fix a leaky toilet? This is the site with all the answers. Channels for computers, electronics, home, science and more. | [www.howstuffworks.com](http://www.howstuffworks.com) |

Library Spot. An easy-to-navigate uber-library that provides answers to question with links to innumerable reference sites, including many other libraries. | [www.libraryspot.com](http://www.libraryspot.com) |

Refdesk. An outstanding site filled with fact-finding links and connections to hundreds search engines and research sites. | [www.refdesk.com](http://www.refdesk.com) |

Visual Thesaurus. A work of art that is also an excellent thesaurus. Synonyms and definitions unfold on your screen in a beautiful ballet. A slow-loading site, but well worth the wait. | [www.visualthesaurus.com](http://www.visualthesaurus.com) |

## Creativity

CreativityforLife.com. Explore the creative process in your work and in your personal life. Plus links to many other creativity sites. | [www.creativityforlife.com](http://www.creativityforlife.com) |

Creativity-Portal. An elegant site that promotes creativity in all areas of life but features a page specific to writing. | [www.creativity-portal.com](http://www.creativity-portal.com) |

The Soul Food Cafe. A soothing site that promotes writing and creative pursuits as a daily practice. Full of tips, techniques, references and encouragement for writers of all kinds. | [www.dailywriting.net](http://www.dailywriting.net)

## Organization

Tinderbox. This software application stores notes, ideas and plans, mapping them in colors and shapes as they're created. It then scans the notes and links and organizes them by patterns and relationships. It will even gather and update relative info and breaking news from the Internet. Mac only. Available from [www.eastgate.com](http://www.eastgate.com) .

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Walter is an professional advertising copywriter who writes, edits and publishes "WORDS@WORK", a FREE bimonthly newsletter of advice and about writing that works. To view his award-winning portfolio and to subscribe, visit <http://www.walterburek.com> . You may also subscribe via mailto: WordsAtWork@comcast.net .

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