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Words at Work: Powerful business writing delivers increased sales, improved results, and even a promotion or two. A veteran writing coach shows you how.

Lynda McDaniel
Association for Creative Business Writing
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When 140 character tweets count as communications, writing seems a doomed art. Not so fast, says long-time writer and writing coach Lynda McDaniel. Beyond Twitter and text messages, all those digital bits and bytes on web sites, blogs, newsletters, and press releases are fundamentally ideas in words. If writing is not developed as a skill, she argues, the quality of our ideas rapidly degenerates. Her book is a passionate plea aimed at replenishing the idea wellspring of "American Ingenuity."

McDaniel, in the tradition of Strunk and White, has created a guide perfectly suited to the contemporary workplace. Her personal writing journey, started while she was homesteading in North Carolina, sets the tone for her encouraging if-I-can-do-it, so-can-you approach.

Decades of on-the-job writing netted horror stories aplenty. These enliven the learning process while embodying her enthusiasm for writing. "Even the rejects are part of the process," she notes. She models her lessons using vivid words, sentence structure variety, and even well-placed fragments, illustrating how to spice up even the dullest business communication.

Succinct chapters show how to overcome procrastination; boost creativity; deal with inner (and outer) critics; get those crummy first drafts out on paper; work with the inverted pyramid (and what that means) to structure writing; cut jargon; directly address readers' needs; and edit, edit, edit.

McDaniel is on a mission to remove fear from writing; her use of image and metaphor provides unusual color. "It's like making a loaf of bread," or "It's more like picking blackberries" [out of the brambles] "than picking huckleberries," [that fall into your bucket practically effortlessly.] Image-rich, witty approaches like "The Bad News Burrito" give unconfident writers a visual, tangible understanding of writing craft.

For those who loathe outlining, the chapter titled "Eureka" includes a detailed

explanation of a “Brain Dump” technique that is the basis of an “organic outline.” McDaniel explains step by step how to get there. Her discussion of “projection” for writers is unusually insightful and too rarely considered in other basic writing guides.

Brief before and after writings illustrate the increased clarity available after editing, whether moving from passive to active voice or turning bureaucratic-ese into clear prose. Though experienced writers may perceive there’s not adequate meat on the bones, this solid little book packs a punch—with powerful reminders for the pros while giving fearful writers a coach, cheerleader, and role model. McDaniel shares proven practices learned the hard way. This deceptively simple and engaging guide for workplace writers is highly recommended.

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