

WRITE TIGHT : FOREWORD

By Stanley K. Ridgley

You have to love college writing courses.

Well, you must at least spare some love for the *idea* of college writing courses. Unfortunately, my experience is that with respect to most undergraduate college writing courses, it's love unrequited.

They don't deliver. By this, I mean that college writing courses don't teach college students how to write.

It's true. They don't.

Now, perhaps this is an exaggeration, an overgeneralization. Maybe. But I've been jaded by enough anecdotal evidence and by enough first-hand dealing with undergraduate writing to know that someone isn't doing the job, regardless of who the folks might be. Moreover, mine is not a voice crying in the wilderness. In fact, there's a whole chorus that's been growing for years now.

Now, why is this?

Perhaps it's because graduate students—many of them fresh out of school themselves—teach the writing courses. Often, these grad students themselves don't really know how to write convincingly, clearly, succinctly

Oh, they may know theory. They may know thought. They may know theme. And they may know deconstruction. They may refer with a thoughtful nod to the "muse."

But they don't know how to write to communicate, to connect with the reader, to convey ideas from one person to another via the written word. Indeed, I venture to say that the affliction of postmodernism has reduced many of our university writing programs to a waste of time at best and to crude propaganda sessions at worst.

Enter *Write Tight*.

Write Tight is one of the best books on writing ever written. I firmly believe that, and mind you, I have collected on my bookshelf in the past fifteen years more than two hundred different books on writing—from Jacques Barzun to William Zinsser to George Orwell. *Write Tight* is a doozy.

I'm fond of saying that *Write Tight's* chapter 2 is, by itself, worth the price of the book. Read it, and I'm certain you'll agree with me. But one of the joys, of course, is that you needn't stop at chapter 2.

The entire book is a trove of journalistic jewels, and one of its secrets is its premise that writing is as much craft as art, and, because of this, better writing can be taught. There exist rules that, if followed, will lift your prose above the

mundane and just plain bad. You will become a better writer as a result of this book *in spite of yourself*.

And this is why I rejoiced at discovering Bill Brohaugh's *Write Tight* several years ago. I conduct a regular writing seminar for college students, and at the time I was looking for a companion volume to go with Strunk and White's *Elements of Style*. When I found *Write Tight*, I immediately ordered every remaining copy from the warehouse—a total of 105.

So, while for several years I had a personal stock for my writing seminars, *Write Tight* was simply unavailable to the millions of college students who would benefit from its use.

Then, I, too, was running out of copies. The book was out of print. What could I do?

Rather than find a substitute, I went to the source, Mr. Brohaugh himself, a longtime editor of *Writer's Digest*.

After a back-and-forth (these things always must go back-and-forth for at least a bit) ISI Books decided to continue *Write Tight* in print, and Mr. Brohaugh agreed that this should be done. And that is how we have arrived at this, another occasion for rejoicing—the publication of *Write Tight*'s second edition.

Mr. Brohaugh has packed into this book more quality writing instruction than you will find in any writing course on any university campus in America. Why? Because it is definite, concrete, uncompromising, and clear. It is forthright.

In the argot of another decade, *Write Tight* "tells it like it is."

Not what you wish it *might* be.

Not that you are *already* a great writer, fully formed.

Write Tight hits the fundamentals. *Hard*.

I wish that this book had been available to me as an undergraduate. Failing that, I now hope that we can put as many copies of *Write Tight* into the hands of as many undergraduates as possible as a bracing tonic to all the high-priced hackery and puffery and pretension that masquerades as art.

You *will* become a better writer as a result of this book. That's a guarantee that Bill Brohaugh is too modest to make. So I'll do it for him.

You *will* become a better writer as a result of this book.

I guarantee it.

- STANLEY K. RIDGLEY, Ph.D. Wilmington, Delaware