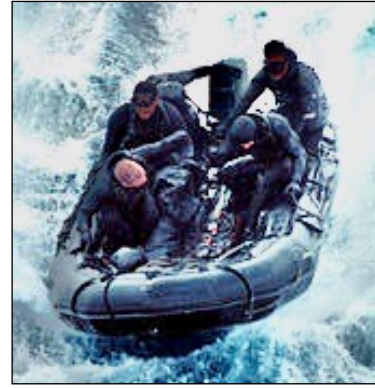


In the Military, Clear Writing Can Make the Difference Between Life and Death. That's Why the Navy SEALs Require Plain Writing Workshops.



According to Admiral John Richardson, a retired four-star who previously served as the U.S. Navy's 31st Chief of Naval Operations, "By reading and writing, we are improving ourselves and the Navy. We are preparing for when we are called into battle."¹ Preparing for battle by learning to write well? As counterintuitive as that may seem, it's sound policy for the Navy SEALs leadership training program—which is why they require a writing course for their warfighters. Need more proof of the importance of writing in the military? Read on.

It is not surprising, perhaps, that the writing done by senior officers carries great weight. But it is rather remarkable how important writing can be for junior people.... When junior enlisted become senior they will at the very minimum have to draft enlisted evaluations and letters of commendation for their people ... and often they will have much more writing to do. As for officers, sooner or later almost all of them will join staffs on which writing becomes a major personal responsibility. In short, virtually all naval professionals should learn the principles of good writing early in their careers.²

Custom-Designed Workshops Are More Relevant, Interesting

Following that dictum, the training officer at the Naval Special Warfare Command at Naval Amphibious Base Coronado in San Diego, California, reached out to *The Executive Writer* to teach a Plain Writing course for 25 of SEAL Team 3's junior officers and senior noncommissioned officers. "Over the past seventeen years, we've been conducting writing workshops for the Department of the Navy as well as other departments and federal agencies," said Kevin Ryan, Ph.D., President of *The Executive Writer*. "One of the officers in a previous workshop recommended my company to the SEALs' training officer in Coronado."

"Our courses help federal agencies meet their requirement to comply with the Plain Writing Act of 2010."

Dr. Ryan designed a course tailored specifically to Navy SEALs. "I'm a veteran as well as a bit of a military history buff, so I enjoyed going online and looking for examples of military writing to use in the workshop's exercises. We always try to use writing samples that the participants encounter on the job every day or relate to their jobs in some way. That makes our courses 100% relevant and keeps their interest throughout the day-long workshop."

Lessons That Napoleon and Custer Learned the Hard Way

He found several examples that struck a cord for the officers in the course. “Everyone in class,” said Ryan, “read the actual orders that—because they were so poorly written—led to the disastrous charge of the Light Brigade during the Crimean War, the massacre of Custer’s battalion at the Little Bighorn, and the defeat of Napoleon at Waterloo. Then we discussed each order in detail, analyzing exactly where the writing failed to make sense. Next, the officers rewrote the orders to be clear and concise by applying Plain Writing principles. Finally, we shared and discussed their individual revisions. It turned out to be a very instructive, fun, and insightful exercise.”

“Participants can reduce what they write—and what their readers have to read—by 20-40%.”

The Executive Writer workshops are based on best practices used by professional writers and include many hands-on, interactive exercises along with instructor and peer feedback. Along with many other topics, each course teaches simple and doable writing tips, the role of Writer’s Intuition and active voice in the writing process, the elements of Plain Writing, and how participants can reduce what they write—and what their readers have to read—by 20-40% or more. “Our courses help federal agencies meet their requirement to comply with the Plain Writing Act of 2010,” said Ryan. “The Act was implemented because, unfortunately, poor writing is endemic. A report by the National Commission on Writing found that states spend \$221 million each year on remedial writing classes for their employees, and businesses across the U.S. spend \$3.1 billion. The federal government has to fall somewhere in between those figures, so improving writing will obviously save considerable money as well as time.”



The SEAL Trident

The Best Feedback Is Repeat Customers

The SEAL workshop was so successful that the training officer approached Dr. Ryan to teach the same course to ten other SEAL Commands. “Our goal for each workshop is to make sure each participant leaves with skills they can apply to the very next email, report, or other writing project they write,” said Ryan. “The feedback and consistently high evaluations we receive tell us we are meeting these goals. Customizing workshops to meet each client’s needs takes a bit of work, but it really pays off—and it helps that we love what we do.”

¹ “Now Hear This—Read. Write. Fight,” Admiral John Richardson with Lieutenant Ashley O’Keefe.

² *The Naval Institute Guide to Naval Writing*, third edition, Robert Shenk, pp.1-3.

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