



The Seven Deadly Sins of Writers

In my experience, novice writers tend to worry about the wrong things. They fret over comma splices, and they hear that adverbs are evil, so they diligently delete all their adverbs. Diligently, I say. But in the world of nonfiction, there are deadlier "sins" to commit.

Sin #1 ~ Rely on formatting for emphasis -- such as enlarging, bolding, italicizing, and centering the text.

{Use strong concise verbs and nouns for emphasis instead.}

Sin #2 ~ Overuse. Punctuation. For. Emphasis. Especially with the ellipsis . . . and exclamation marks!!!

{I repeat: Use strong concise verbs and nouns for emphasis instead.}

Sin #3 ~ Try too hard to sound like a popular writer.

{This produces a copy of a copy of a copy, resulting in a blurry distortion of a writer's true voice. A person's writing should sound like the person writing it. This creates authenticity and originality. Great writing sounds natural.}

Sin #4 ~ Never make a point and continue to meander through vague, ambiguous language.

{Clarity is the single most important characteristic of good writing. It doesn't matter how great the content is if the reader can't understand it.}

Sin #5 ~ Over quote other writers.

{Quotes are speedbumps for readers. They force the reader to mentally switch to hearing another person's voice and then back the author's voice. Too many quotes in a text make the readers do mental gymnastics. Eventually, readers will quit reading, oftentimes unaware of why they're not enjoying the material. Write with your own words, and use quotes sparingly.}

Sin #6 ~ Neglect to read their work aloud.

{Writers can catch the majority of their own errors and improve their flow and syntax if they would simply listen to their writing with their ear. Writers should always read their work aloud before sharing it with others.}

Sin #7 ~ Never begin.

{Forgive me for stating the obvious. But the writing won't ever get written if we don't begin. The most important step a writer could take is to write that first sentence down, then that first paragraph, then that first page. Just begin.}