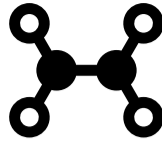




ANDRÉS CRUCIANI
THE ONLY BOOK ON
WRITING YOU'LL EVER
NEED LOL
FIRST EDITION 2019

INTRODUCTION	4
WHO AM I?.....	6
WHO ARE YOU?	7
CHAPTER 1: WHAT IS WRITING?	8
WRITING IS POWER.....	8
EXERCISE 1	10
WHY DO WE PRETEND?	11
ONE: CONTEXT IS KING	11
TWO: A BRAVE NEW WORLD	12
THREE: BECAUSE WE'RE PLAYING.....	15
EXERCISE 2	18
CHAPTER 2: FUTHERMUCKER	20
WHAT IS CURSING?	21
WHAT MAKES A WORD BAD?	24
ONE: WORDS INTENDED TO GROUP AND HARM	25
WORDS FOR WAR!	26
WORDS FOR MONEY!	27
THE EFFECT OF WORDS FOR POWER.....	28
TWO: NONSCIENTIFIC SEX/GENITAL WORDS	30
VULGAR LANGUAGE	31
ELITE ENGLISH IS CRUMBLING.....	32
SO WHAT'S THE DEAL WITH SEX WORDS?	33
GENITAL WORDS DEAL WITH POWER.....	35
A "QUICK" ASIDE ON SEX V. GENDER	39
BACK TO GENDER NOUNS/PRONOUNS.....	41
THE THIRD CATEGORY: DEROGATORY GENITAL WORDS	42
SO, SHOULD WE CURSE???	44
HOW SHOULD WE BE?	46
EXERCISE 3	47
ONE MILLION.....	48
CHAPTER 3: WRITING IN 2019	57
WHAT DICTIONARY SHOULD I USE?	57

EXERCISE 4	63
SLANG VS. PROFESSIONALISM	63
KNOW YOUR AUDIENCE.....	64
ONE: KNOW YOUR AUDIENCE—FOR REAL THIS TIME.....	70
SLANG (VS. PROFESSIONALISM) (ATTEMPT TWO).....	72
PROFESSIONALISM (VS. SLANG)	74
PROFESSIONALISM (VS. SLANG)—ATTEMPT TWO	76
PROFESSIONAL WRITING (ATTEMPT THREE, I GUESS).....	79
HOW TO MAKE YOUR WRITING PROFESSIONAL	80
KNOW YOUR AUDIENCE (AGAIN)	80
CHAPTER 4: ADVICE FROM PROFESSIONALS.....	81
CHAPTER 5: HOW TO WRITE FICTION.....	82
CHAPTER 6: ADVICE FROM WRITERS	83
CHAPTER 7: THE DIFFERENT FORMS OF WRITING.....	84
CHAPTER 8: ADVICE FROM ENGLISH TEACHERS	85
CHAPTER 9: HOW TO EDIT	86
CHAPTER 10: GRAMMAR—the parts of speech.....	87
NOUNS	87
PRONOUNS	88
VERBS	90
ADJECTIVES	90
ADVERBS	91
INTERJECTIONS	92
CONJUNCTIONS	93
CHAPTER 11: THE MOST COMMON MISTAKES IN ENGLISH	95
CHAPTER 12: PLAGIARISM	96



CHAPTER 1: WHAT IS WRITING?

Before learning the rules of writing, it's important to have some understanding of what writing is. Anyone who has a phone, email, computer, pen, or pencil is dealing with writing all the time. But how often do we pause to think about the act of turning thoughts into written words?

WRITING IS POWER

Despite how often we engage with writing, despite how *lackadaisically* we may treat it, there's simply no way of denying the power of writing. Whether you're religious or not, consider the following examples:

- In the King James Version of the bible, the Book of John (1:1-14) begins with "In the beginning was the Word, and the Word was with God, and the Word was God."
- The Quran (literally translating to "the recitation") is the central religious text of Islam. Billions of people have lived their entire lives according its words.
- Words are considered so powerful in Judaism that, traditionally, Jewish people are not allowed to pronounce their God's name unless they're praying. So, in Jewish writing, you might find God's name unpronounceably written as YHVH.
- The Heart Sutra of Buddhism dates back to 661 AD. Those same words, now translated into numerous languages, are still chanted today by hundreds of millions of people.

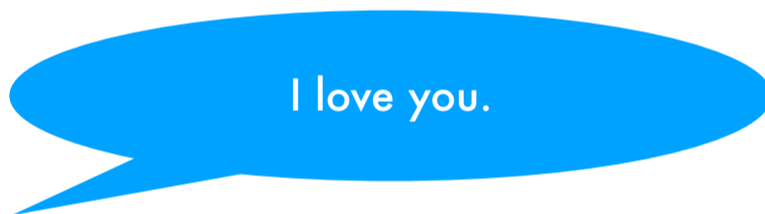
But, of course, there's no end to examples of the power of words, religious or *secular*.

- Galileo Galilei, astronomer, was sentenced to house arrest for the last nine years of his life for publishing a book supporting the *heliocentric theory* (stating that the Sun is at the center of our solar system).
- Larry Page and Sergey Brin, the founders of Google, are currently the twelfth and thirteenth richest people on the planet for, essentially, finding a really good way of using

words to search for other words.

- While on the topic of money, JK Rowling is now a billionaire for writing fantasy books about a young wizard.
- By 1860, there were almost four MILLION slaves in the US. With Abraham Lincoln's Emancipation Proclamation, slavery in the South was abolished on January 1, 1863—just 4.5 pages of hand-written words.
- One of the most famous American speeches, Martin Luther King's *I Have a Dream Speech*, was crafted and honed for months (if not years) and lives on, as an ideal, more than fifty years after its recital.
- The United States declared independence from *a whole other country* (Great Britain) using a measly 1,458 words.
- The US declared war against Germany on December 11, 1941, using 225 words. Between 50 and 80 MILLION died in World War II.

Writing can be art. Words can be poetry, or weapons. But regardless, writing is power. Consider how you'd feel if you got, for the first time in your life, the following text:



Now, consider if just a few months later, that same person texted you this:



Change one single word, you change the entire meaning of a relationship, its future, perhaps your hopes and dreams. Change one word, and you race from one pole of emotion to its opposite. Words have the power to destroy, or the power to save lives.

Consider the following real text message sent in 2018 from an Afghan boy to a woman, the head of a small hospital, as she sat in a conference in New York City:

I ned halp darivar no stap car no oksijan in the car no signal
iam in the cantenar. lam no jokan valla

What did Liz Clegg, who'd given a phone to the seven-year-old Afghan boy a month earlier at a refugee camp in France, realize the text meant?

I need help. The driver won't stop the car. No oxygen in the car.
No signal. I'm in a container. I am not joking. I swear to God.

Liz Clegg called the authorities. The phone was traced, and soon cops had pulled over a truck in Leicestershire, England. Inside the truck's container, they found fourteen migrants, fourteen *people*, on the verge of asphyxiation.

EXERCISE 1

- 1) Write a real-life example of your own in which a few written words have had an incredible impact either on humanity, a loved one, or your own life.
- 2) Write a text message that might save someone's life.
- 3) I've given a number of examples on why writing is power, but what are some counterarguments? Come up with two or three reasons why writing is *not*, in fact, powerful. Then, given the arguments for and against, decide what you actually believe and explain why.
- 4) There's a popular *adage* stating that "the pen is mightier than the sword". Do you agree with this statement? Why or why not? (Also, define "adage".)

WHY DO WE PRETEND?

The question that begs asking⁶ at this point is why do we pretend that words are harmless? Why, when commenting online for example, do we write things we might never dream of saying in public? Why do we send text messages we know have the potential to devastate someone? Why do we post things on Instagram and Facebook and Snapchat that, as evidenced by the sheer number of teenage suicides spurred by online bullying, why do we share posts as deadly and targeted as sniper bullets? Why, really, do we pretend like our words aren't the immensely powerful tools and weapons they are?

There are several answers to this.

ONE: CONTEXT IS KING

First and foremost, while words can certainly be lethal (“Off with his head!”), the truth is, they can also be docile, disposable, and inconsequential. The very same language we use to sentence someone to a life in prison we use to order a slice of pizza. The same language we blather at a baby—*Ooooh! You're just the sweetest little creature I've ever seen and yes aren't you just the cutest little*—we use to ask



"Yes, I said '#\$%!%', but it was taken out of context!"

⁶ To “beg the question” is actually a logical fallacy in which a person makes a conclusion based on an unsupported assumption. E.g.,^a I’m always right because I’m never wrong. (That sentence is also an example of circular reasoning.) I came to the conclusion “I’m always right” based on an assumption that’s unsupported. However, “begs the question” has come to commonly mean “raises the question”, and, in the paragraph above, that’s how I used it despite the howls from contemporary grammarians.^b More on grammarians later, but for now, know I “misused” the phrase simply to show what cannot be helped: language evolves (more on that later too). Lol.

^a E.g. is an abbreviation of the Latin *exempli gratia*, translating to “for example”.

^b If this improper usage happens to bother you (shouldn’t we be using words as they were intended?), know that “begging the question” is actually a mistranslation itself (!) of the Latin *petitio principii* (“assuming the initial point”).

the love of our lives to marry us with. The *exact* same words we might use jokingly with a friend after he pranks us by putting plastic wrap over the toilet bowl—“I’ll kill you!”—become deadly serious after a family member’s safety is harmed: “I’ll kill you.”

So, it’s not necessarily that we’re pretending that words have no or little meaning, but that we intuitively understand that context is extraordinarily important. After you retort against your friend by putting flour in the air intake of his car so that when he turns it on he gets a giant puff of flour in his face and then has to spend an hour vacuuming said flour from the crevices of his seat cushions after which, throwing the door to your dorm room open, still covered in flour, he shouts, “I’ll kill you!” you don’t call the cops. But when those same words came from a knife-wielding lunatic, you do. You see, we all know it: context matters.

TWO: A BRAVE NEW WORLD

The second reason we might pretend that words are less powerful than they are is that, frankly, we’re in uncharted territory. Believe it or not, if you’re a high schooler now, there’s a strong possibility that when your parents were children, *the internet did not exist*. What that essentially means is that no one has ever—*EVER*—not in the entire history of humankind (200,000 years, and millions of years farther back if you include *hominids*), had to deal with the massive information we’re both currently immersed in and adding to. Rules of writing and information that were once relatively clear are now being made as we go.

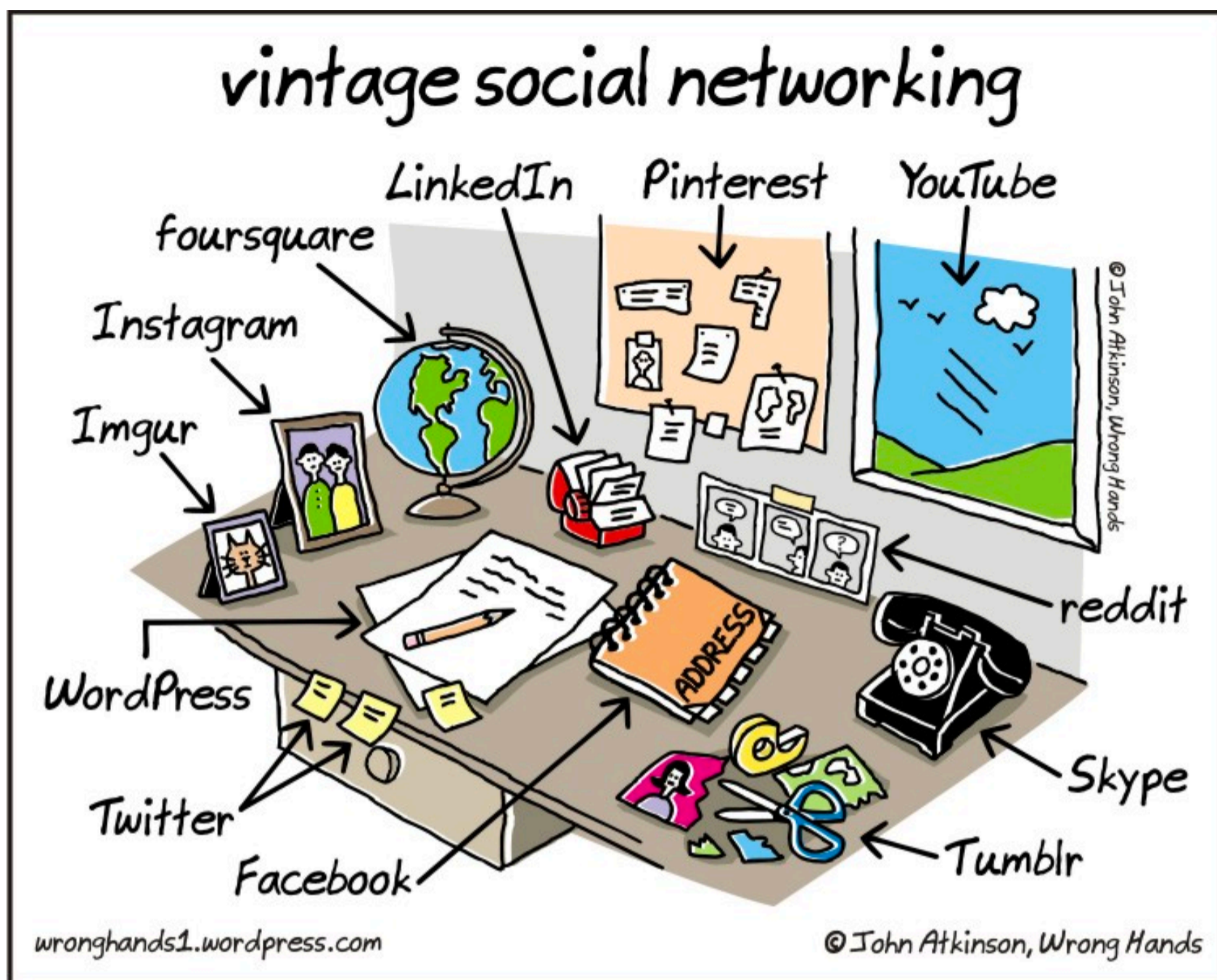
Take, for example, Facebook. It has over two BILLION users, yet you, being the hip, savvy global citizen that you are, might already find Facebook outdated even though it literally didn’t exist fifteen years ago. That means that before even fully answering the questions of “What are the rules of Facebook?”, “What’s Facebook’s etiquette?”, “What is Facebook, as a medium, really suited for?”, we’re moving onto a new medium with new rules, new etiquette, and new parameters.

Please take a moment to fully appreciate what that means. People were writing on clay tablets for thousands of years. Papyrus, a material similar to paper, thousands of years too. If we think about writing utensils, the graphite/lead pencil has been around for hundreds of years. The pen probably reaches back to the dawn of humanity with people etching in soil and sand with branches. The pen, paper, even the typewriter, all of these were relatively slow media and utensils to work with, and so, their rules developed slowly, thoughtfully, over a long period of time. Now, however, we are changing our tools and “platforms”

almost as quickly as our clothes, and it's starting to seem that just as one new medium starts to take a hold, another's already waiting to take its place.

Of course, you can argue that Facebook, Instagram, Snapchat, Twitter, they're not really different media (you can type words on all of them and all you're doing, really, is posting them in different little boxes), and this is rather true. Are these different apps actually different media? Or are they just different heads of the same "social media" *hydra*? Is there a *real* difference between Instagram and Twitter? Or are they both just slight variations of each other—different UI (user interface), different posting limits, different audiences—but ultimately just *iterations* of the same thing? I'll tell you what I think in a sec, but what do *you* think? Are the different social media apps actually different? Go ahead and give your thoughts below.

This image shows a blank sheet of white paper with horizontal ruling lines. The lines are evenly spaced and run across the width of the page. There are no margins, text, or other markings on the paper.



Now, here's what I think:⁷ Different social media have both different parameters (as of writing this, you can only type 280 characters on Twitter) and audiences (Snapchat *hews*

⁷ And look, here's another thing you *must* know about writing: Whether the writing is in the first person (I, me) or the third (she, he, it, they), writing is always a reflection of the author. Even if, for example, I'd not prefaced the paragraph with "here's what I think", I'd obviously still be *expounding* on my own thoughts and opinions. Writing is always filtered through the eye (the pen/keyboard) of the author. HOWEVER, this does not mean that facts don't exist. Just because we're always writing and reading through our own lenses doesn't mean that everything we write is opinion and everything is equally true. E.g., just because I write "Fireballs hailed down on Philadelphia on October 28, 2018, and destroyed the entire city" does not mean that my interpretation of reality (my lens) is just as valid as that of someone who says, "No, they didn't." My statement was *patently* false. What the fact that we're always reading and writing through our own lenses means, however, is that as we read, we want to take into consideration, we want to be aware of, both the author's biases AND our own.

toward a younger audience), due to which they have subtly different etiquettes. You might, for example, post a tirade on Facebook about how your neighbor never picks up her dog's poop. On Instagram, you might just post a picture of it (the poop).

What this tells us is that while the platforms are quite similar, each has different rules of engagement; however, these rules aren't being told explicitly (you didn't, for example, get an email from Snapchat saying "Don't let your teachers follow you" and "Don't post nude selfies"—though maybe you should have?). Rather, these rules are being dictated by the platform's constraints (a 280 word limit on Twitter, for example), by the platform's audience, and by the real-world consequences of your ****-ups.

As you know, there's no guide to using Facebook. There's no manual on how to use Twitter properly. Entire books were once dedicated to etiquette—how to set a meal properly, how to be a lady/gentleman—but who would ever read a whole book about posting properly on Snapchat? So, because these manuals don't exist (and because probably nobody would read them if they did), *everyone* is learning on the fly. And, because of that, *everyone's* making mistakes.

So, if there are no set rules or manuals, if everyone's screwing up and learning as they, as *we*, go along, wouldn't it therefore make sense to treat words lighter than they actually are? to pretend that the words we fling are not bullets and knives and roses but, well, popcorn? snowflakes (here and gone)? just so much, well, hot air? I mean, imagine, just for a sec, what would happen if everyone took everything written on the internet seriously ...

THREE: BECAUSE WE'RE PLAYING

Finally, and perhaps the most truthful and real reason we don't acknowledge writing as the power it is (especially when posting on social media), is because most of the time we write, we're playing.⁸ If every time we wrote something we thought of the potential impact of our words—not just the immediate impact, but the distant and far-reaching impact (the impact of our words five, ten, fifty, and a hundred years from now, the impact of our words when people we'd never expected to read them *do*)—we'd never write a single thing. We'll come back to this.

⁸ Or we're just giving straight-up information, like what time you'll be home for dinner. But I'll probably cover this more when I talk about professionalism in a future chapter.

To write is to create, to attempt to turn our thoughts—the intangible—into the tangible. Every time we do so, we move from the imaginary and into the real.⁹ When we do that, turning our thought into something “physical”, we lose something. Our words rarely convey exactly what we’re thinking,¹⁰ particularly if what we’re thinking is an idea, or an image. If this weren’t true, then why are statements like “Does that make sense?” or “Do you know what I mean?” (“Nawmean?”) so common?

If the universe around us is the truth as it is, words are mere approximations of that truth. Reality is before us, all around us, but words are ideas, *impositions* on that reality. To prove this, that words are just approximations, ideals, there are all sorts of fun little games you can play. Try these:

- There’s a Buddhist *koan*¹¹ that goes like this: Gettan Osho said, “Keichu, the first wheelmaker, made a cart whose wheels had a hundred spokes. Now, suppose you took a cart and removed both the wheels and the axle. What would you have?”
- Or, similar to the one above, if you pluck your hair, eventually you will be bald. But let’s say you have a full head of hair (i.e., not bald). If I pluck one of your hairs at a time, when have you become bald?
- One last famous one: The barber shaves all people who do not shave themselves. Who shaves the barber?

That we can create such paradoxes with words means that there’s something faulty with our words. They are imperfect. They are true for a moment, but then that truth, as the moment passes, seems to disappear. (Consider, as an example, the statements: “It is raining,” or, “I

⁹ Now, whether thought is imaginary and the written word is real is itself a fascinating question. Is a written word more real than a thought? If every thought is biologically based (we could “see” your thoughts on an MRI machine), are thoughts actually imaginary?

¹⁰ If you don’t believe me, if you think you can explain something precisely, try the following exercises: Explain, in words, the color blue to a blind person. Then, explain what cinnamon smells like to someone who cannot smell.^a

^a BTW, someone who can’t smell is *anosmic*.

¹¹ A koan is a riddle used in Zen Buddhism intended to surpass logical reasoning in order to reach enlightenment.

am happy.”) There are, of course, objective truths we can speak and write about.¹² E.g., my grandmother is dead. But much of the time, in emails and texts (where, I suspect, the bulk of us do our writing), we are dealing with subjective truths. We are talking about feelings, ideas, whims, things that are here and gone, with words that, were we to read them twenty years from now, we’d ask: Who wrote that? Ideas and feelings that in response to the question, “How was the funeral?” get pushed through the channel of writing to come out via text message as “It was horrible”—words that so fail to capture our experience, that so fail to capture the true horribleness of the funeral, the truth depth of our feelings at the loss of a person we held so dear, that the instant we say it, “It was horrible,” we know words have failed us. We can attempt, and we can write essays and stories intending to *elicit* the emotions that death and loss have elicited in us, but we know that we will always fail. No essay can truly capture the years of pain at losing someone close. No story can fully convey a hole in one’s heart. Still, we try. We put into words. We do our best and approximate ...

Now, let’s return to where we started this section, with the knowledge that it’s almost impossible to imagine the reach of our words.¹³ We write, and our words extend out into the *ether* and seem to take on a life of their own. I’m not talking something mystical or magical here: I’m talking about something real. Imagine, for example, the Facebook post that suddenly goes viral. From one person’s head, that thought-turned-writing now enters the minds of hundreds of thousands, of millions across the entire world. How does that post then affect the lives it has touched? Sometimes, as with say, a funny cat video, that post won’t affect lives very much. But what about when that post is something more meaningful? What about when that post is a new idea and that new idea spreads across the globe like, well, a virus? How does that single post affect all of the lives it touches? Who could possibly predict its effects?

Our words are like stones thrown into a pond. Those stones ripple the water, and those ripples extend out in all directions, to times and places we’d never imagined. This is the

¹² It’s important to understand the difference between *subjective* and *objective*. Subjective deals with one’s own “personal truth”. Objective deals with things that are true for everyone, always.

¹³ I mean, listen, in 1972, Dolores Huerta, cofounder of what would become the United Farm Workers union, came up with the slogan *Sí se puede* (“Yes we can”). Do you think she had any clue that Barak Obama, eleven years old at the time, would one day use the slogan to become the first African-American president of the United States? Do you think that Friedrich Nietzsche, philosopher, knew that one day, forty years after his death, his philosophy would be *touted* by Adolph Hitler?

principal of karma, but, again, this is not mystical. This is actually how ideas *transmuted* to words function: they're written down, *disseminated* (via Twitter or email or WhatsApp), and then they ripple outwards to find homes in the minds of readers who then speak those same words to others and others likewise, onwards the words go thorough space and time. Often, those words live short lives, their ripples die quickly. But perhaps more often than we realize, those words live lives whose length and importance we never would have imagined.¹⁴

Because of these two things—that words are mere approximations of truths and that they live long lives of their own—it seems as though we have no real choice *but* to play with words, to use them with a certain amount of frivolity. Because if we didn't, if we really thought about the full implications of our words—both their inability and incredible longevity and power—how on Earth would we ever be able to write down a single thing? We would analyze our thoughts into a complete and utter silence.

Now, given that sometimes we *must* write (a text, an email, an essay for your ogre of a teacher) whether we want to face the incredible potential consequences of our words or not, the first question is not How do we do write? but, in fact, How should we be?

So, let's talk about cursing.

EXERCISE 2

- 1) Based on your own experience, create your own rulebook for your favorite social media platform.
- 2) Create your own social media platform. Describe it. How would it be different from other platforms? How would it be the same? What would the parameters for your platform be?
- 3) I've made the argument that most of time, when we write, we're simply pretending that words don't have the power they do. What do *you* think? Are we indeed pretending that words are harmless? Or is there something else at play here that I've missed?
- 4) Throughout this book so far, I've been italicizing words you might not know. Find five of

¹⁴ Has, for example, someone ever said anything to you that really stuck, that perhaps changed how you thought, but then, when you told them, "Hey remember when you said *x*?" they looked at you and said, "I don't remember that at all"?

these words, look up their definitions, and put those words in sentences. THEN, show your sentences to someone who knows a lot of vocabulary and ask them for feedback on your usage. THEN, rewrite your sentences based on their feedback. Give yourself an A for effort.