



Association for Creative Business Writing

How to write a bang-up bio

Four tips to get you started writing a bio that sets you apart from the rest.

Too many professional profiles on LinkedIn or Facebook are dry, boring, and laced with alphabet-soup credentials. Not really writing at all. And what a waste. Social media gives us a chance to showcase ourselves, to set ourselves apart instead of crawling into the same den as everyone else. Consider these:

- *Accomplished writer and editor with hundreds of articles in major magazines, newspapers, and trade publications. M.F.A. in writing from...*
- *Author, nonfiction books, magazine writer. Publications include...*

Not a good start—and these are examples from professional writers!

Let's look at a couple more examples. Which of these would keep you reading?

A. *John Jones is the CFO at Burken & Associates. He attended Stanford University, where he received a B.S. in computer science and a master's degree in accounting.*

B. *When John Jones became the CFO at Burken & Associates, he thanked a lot of people who helped him along the way. Professor Rable at Stanford University, where he earned a B.S. in computer science and a master's degree in accounting; Mary Cowen, his first boss at H & R Block; and Jack Brown....*

No question that B makes me want to know more about John. Engaging profiles and bios *show* rather than tell. In B, John Jones showed us that he's a nice guy, someone we'd like to work with. Instead of a boring stew of credentials and corporations, he used gratitude to list credentials and jobs in a creative way. Too often, we try to cram a lot of detail into a small space—leaving the reader with little that distinguishes us from all the other people with college degrees and impressive careers.

So, how do you dig deeper to find the good stuff?

1. Brainstorm about yourself. Most people feel uncomfortable writing about themselves. Their minds go blank, and they end up writing the standard stuff. I witnessed this firsthand while teaching Realtors how to write their bios. A woman came up to me almost in tears—she'd just started as a Realtor, she said, so she had nothing to write about. But the gray streaks in her hair told me something different. I suggested that she brainstorm about every skill—paid and unpaid—she'd developed over the years and see how these skills applied to her new career. By the end of the workshop she was beaming. (She even hugged me!)

I call the brainstorming technique we used Brain Dump. It's the best antidote to fear and procrastination I know. It helps you when you're stumped for ideas or when you have ideas swimming in your head. (Brain Dump works great either way.) Here's how:

Set a timer for 10 minutes, type without stopping, and let both your left and right brains help you. Your left brain gets all those jumbled facts down on screen/paper; your right brain sweeps in (somehow triggered by the timer and not stopping) with clever ideas you didn't know you had. I've been using this tool for at least 15 years, and I've taught this remarkably easy and effective tool to hundreds of students. I've even been greeted on the street as "Brain Dump Lady." After my initial surprise at the odd moniker, I felt proud, especially when they added comments like, "I'm still using it," or "Love it! It really helps me."

Like that new Realtor, you can uncover a world of ideas. Write about what motivates you, invigorates you, stirs your passion, and makes you proud.

2. Show don't tell. Think about small stories, poignant anecdotes, and interesting scenarios. Instead of telling that you're an expert in such-and-such, show it. The anecdotes illustrate your career better than your titles, areas of expertise, and all those glorious letters after your name. Instead of listing your hard-earned M.B.A. in the first sentence, mention credentials in context, as teachers rather than stars of your story.

3. Craft your comments based on your brand. Don't have one? Take time to think about your brand. What makes your heart sing? How do you want people to see you—really see you? What sets you apart from the competition? Now write your bio to reflect it.

4. Edit your bio from many angles. First, look for grammar goofs. Next time through, check to see if your content is complete and flows one paragraph to the next. Now make sure you've been specific rather than vague. Tailor your bio to each audience you're writing to.

You can use these steps for any situation that requires promotional materials: your résumé, cover letter, company profile, or a press release to the media when you get that promotion you've been working toward.

This is an excerpt from the e-book entitled "*Promote Yourself! 33 tips to help you write bang-up bios, résumés, cover letters, and press releases.*" To get your copy of the full report, go to www.afcbw.com/eshop.asp

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