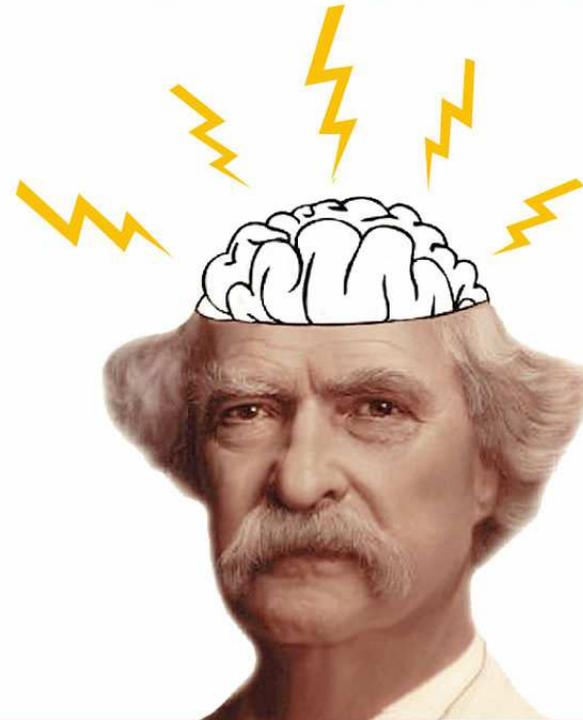


Brain Like Twain



**Improve Your Writing Skills in 30 Days
Using Mark Twain's Secret Methods**

David Andrew Lloyd
With Mark Twain*

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Mark Twain

“The time to begin writing an article is when you have finished it to your satisfaction.”

~ Mark Twain

DAY
8

Finish Your Story Before You Write It

To create his best work, Twain let his ideas simmer, stew and ferment in his fertile mind until they had enough substance to seep up to the surface on their own.

After a friend lent him a copy of Malory's *Le Morte d'Arthur* in 1884, Twain immediately saw the humor between the restrictions of Medieval conventions and the need for modern conveniences:

No pockets in the armour. No way to manage certain requirements of nature. Can't scratch. Cold in the head – can't blow – can't get hankerchief, can't use iron sleeve. Iron gets red hot in the sun – leaks in the rain, gets white from frost and freezes me solid in winter. Suffer from lice and fleas. Make disagreeable clatter when I enter church. Can't dress or undress myself. Always getting struck by lightning...

Twain's Notebook

Notice how his mind changed direction. After observing that he can't wipe a runny nose with *iron*, he suddenly realizes why modern tailors seldom use metal as a fabric.

BRAIN LIKE TWAIN

Write an outline for a story you've been thinking about. You don't need to be extensive on this assignment, but make sure you have *a beginning, a middle and an end.*



Mark Twain

“[The critic] has pulled out his carving-knife and his tomahawk and is starting after a book which he is going to have for breakfast.”

~ Mark Twain

DAY
17

Taking Sides

Have you ever noticed when you have a lover’s quarrel or an argument about your favorite sports team, the other person is *always* wrong?

Writers must acknowledge their own prejudices and overcome this tendency to remain objective. For most of the 19th century, slavery was a polarizing subject, and Twain artfully showed both sides in *Huck Finn*.

It most froze me to hear such talk...coming right out flat-footed and saying he would steal his children – children that belonged to a man I didn’t even know; a man that hadn’t ever done me no harm.

Adventures of Huckleberry Finn

Missouri was a slave state when Twain grew up, so he accepted slavery as a normal part of life. However, when he observed the atrocities and injustices, he had his own conflict of conscience.

This explains why it took a Southerner with firsthand knowledge to write one of the greatest arguments against racial injustice.

BRAIN LIKE TWAIN

Take a hot topic (politics, environment, universal health care), and write a paragraph supporting the side you are least likely to agree with.



Mark Twain

“Ignorant people think it’s the noise which fighting cats make that is so aggravating, but it ain’t so; it’s the sickening grammar they use.”

~ Mark Twain

DAY
21

Specific Words for Specific Reasons

Clarity is essential to help people understand your message.

Resist the urge to use vague words such as “it” or “thing,” or even “they” to describe specific items. Replace these empty words with descriptive phrases and memorable details.

Instead of simply writing, “The steamboat arrived at the dock, and the townspeople ran to it,” Twain wrote:

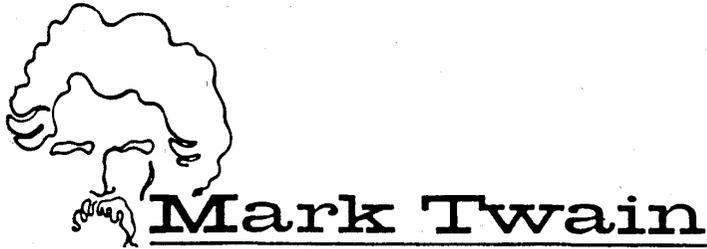
The town drunk stirs...every store and house pours out a human contribution, and all in a twinkling the dead town is alive and moving. Drays, carts, men, boys, all go hurrying from the many quarters to a common center; the wharf.

Life on the Mississippi

When effectively used, written words create a movie in the reader’s mind. Your audience can practically see the imagery, and feel the people’s emotions and thoughts.

BRAIN LIKE TWAIN

Using one of your earlier assignments, replace vague passages with descriptive words, and watch your story evolve.



*“The secret source of
Humor is not joy but
sorrow. There is no humor
in heaven.”*

~ Mark Twain

DAY
23

Adding Punch to Your Punch Lines

Mark Twain used several methods to make his readers smile. One was the *twist* or *zinger*.

Lead your audience in one direction, and then pull the rug out from under them with a surprise at the end. Here are a few Twain classics:

1. “Always do right. This will gratify some people, and astonish the rest.”
2. “It could probably be shown by facts and figures that there is no distinctly native American criminal class except Congress.”
3. “Man is the only animal that blushes. Or needs.”

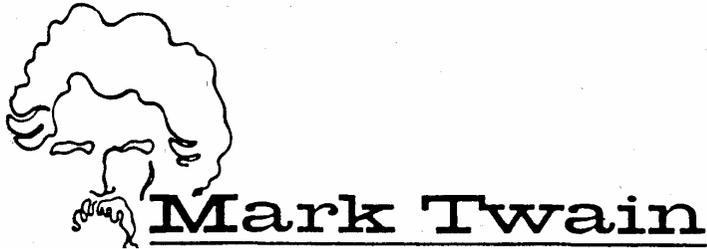
The twist is always the last part of the sentence, and the final word usually packs the most powerful punch.

One of the easiest ways to learn this trick is by twisting a common cliché such as Twain’s, “Familiarity breeds contempt – and children.”

Or the opening quote (Day 1) of this book: “Clothes make the man. Naked people have little or no influence on society.”

BRAIN LIKE TWAIN

Write a list of clichés. Then create twists that give them new and humorous meanings. Now annoy your friends with



“Never put off till tomorrow what may be done day after tomorrow.”

~ Mark Twain

DAY
30 **Blocking Out**
Writer's Block

Writer's block occurs when fear and laziness collide, and it has affected authors since the Egyptians created paper.

“The scariest moment,” noted Stephen King, the master of suspense, “is just before you start writing.”

Maybe you need to do more research to build your confidence in the material (Day 7). Maybe you need to go to the gym or take a walk to refocus your mind (Day 10). But usually you just need to sit down and force yourself to write.

I wrote the rest of *The Innocents Abroad* in sixty days and I could have added a fortnight's of labor with the pen and gotten along without the letter [which the book was based on] altogether...I worked every night from eleven or twelve until broad daylight in the morning...the average was more than 3,000 words day.

Autobiography of Mark Twain

If you're afraid you will write something horrible, relax. Your first draft is supposed to be pathetic (Day 11).

“Don't get it right,” James Thurber noted. “Just get it written.”

BRAIN LIKE TWAIN

Let's end your thirty-day session with your most important assignment -- a speed test. Sit down and write five pages of pure garbage. Yes! Don't wait for any inspiration, just write. This task will help you master difficult times in the future.