

Twain Associates, Inc.

Selecting A Writing Consultant

The basic question is: Why do companies offer writing training? Simple. Because English 101 has grossly failed to teach college graduates to write concisely and persuasively. Corporations don't offer employees retakes of math, economics, or computer science 101.

If English 101 failed the first time around, why whack at the ball the same way again? Yet many writing consultants and writing books simply offer English hash 101 warmed up for a second serving. Students hated the taste the first go around and now fail in business writing. Hash reheated creates even more damage by reinforcing bad habits and sending employees out to fall short once again.

So what would a legitimate writing consultant or stand-alone writing materials offer?

Certainly not a rehash of English 101. The ideal writing advice would offer something very different--for a good reason. English 101 failed. That's why so many companies today offer to correct the wordiness and organizational writing problems of their employees.

A good writing consultant or writing book or DVD would include in his or her instruction a way to measure both conciseness and persuasiveness. And why not? This would be one way to measure if the consultant's advice really worked--did the participants or readers improve? Are participants more concise and persuasive after the seminar? Only measurement tools will answer that.

And last, it's easy to judge fraudulent writing advice. Closely examine how organizing is taught. Does the consultant or material recommend rough drafting, mental maps, or outlines? Does the consultant's or author's organizing system overcome the basic problem of organizing--separating "idea capturing" from the writing process?