

To: Seminar One
From: Jim Toner
Re: Writing and Reading!

1. All of us can learn to write better. None of us can learn to write better unless we work at it. Here are a few suggestions:
 - a. Buy a copy of Strunk, White, and Angell's book *The Elements of Style*, and read it, study it, mark it up! (The cost through Amazon.com is \$7.15—come on, you can afford that!)
 - b. As you read in the future, read at least sometimes (1) for wisdom and (2) for style. By “wisdom,” I mean read for insights into the “permanent things,” the ideas and virtues that endure and which form the bedrock of your professional and personal character. Write those insights down in a journal, on index cards, or in a computer file. By “style,” I mean be alert to crisp, clear, cogent phrases and expressions which writers use to add panache and punch to their efforts.
 - c. “Season” your writing with appropriate quotations, anecdotes, or historical/literary allusions. In short, use your education! Make it work for you. Consider this a to be your “writing/speaking file.”
 - d. Always maintain a TBRODOA file, and work on it! (TBRODOA = to be read one day or another!) Try to read books in logical groups of threes. That is, lump together similar books, giving yourself mini-courses when you can. Take notes on key passages to add to your writing/speaking file.
 - e. It sounds sophomoric, but add words to your vocabulary—not to impress people with “big words,” but to expand your range of expression and so that you can use the right word at the right time.
 - f. Eliminate errors in spelling, grammar, and punctuation. There is a regrettable reverse snobbery which holds that it's really all right to make these kinds of errors because, after all, you wouldn't want anyone to think of you as an “intellectual”! Nonsense. Remember that good clerks and secretaries should NOT change what you give them unless you have a rather specific arrangement along those lines.

1. One cannot write well unless he thinks well. Moreover, one cannot write well unless he has something to say and, normally, unless he holds something dear. Clear thinking about virtues and values is of supreme importance, even though we may not always agree wholly upon the

conclusions drawn. Some things are, indeed, worth arguing about; and we do not have to be disagreeable when we disagree. In particular, I recommend two books to War College folks: Eliot Cohen and John Gooch, *Military Misfortunes*; and Richard Neustadt and Ernest May, *Thinking in Time*. My favorite “philosophy-spiritual” read is Robert Bolt’s play *A Man for All Seasons*. If you have never read Plato’s *Apology*, you should! There are many superb films that you can watch, too. The idea is constantly to re-new your thinking about what’s of permanent or of enduring value. (You can tell that I dismiss the notion that “everything changes.”)

2. I recommend that you seize opportunities to write and speak as often as you reasonably can, given the necessary limitations of time and military clearance/attribution procedures. Remember that Major General Perry Smith recently dressed in his uniform to talk to a group of *cub scouts*. I’ll bet that a few of those kids will long remember the general who came to talk with them.
3. Think about your reading *habits*. To which periodicals do you subscribe? Do you ever clip articles to save in your writing/speaking file? Ever photocopy passages from books to preserve? How much time do you devote to professional reading? Can you increase that time by three hours a week? A good place to start is with the USAF recommended reading list. MG Smith gave out a superb reading list, too. In fact, I recently e-mailed him, suggesting that he add Walter Berns’s new book *Making Patriots* to his list.
4. Last: About speed reading. I read a fair amount, and I am not a speed reader. I underline, take notes, write in the margins, cross-reference to other books in my library as I read, and sometimes laugh or get angry when I read. But I do try all the time to read *just a little faster* than would be otherwise comfortable for me (especially with newspapers and newsmagazines). Try to read just a little faster next time. And the time after that. And the time after that. When you come across a really good passage, share it with your spouse, kids, and colleagues. Invite and expect the same from them; you’re building a “brain trust”!