

tions from different groups of people. Here are some suggestions:

○ *Writers:* Learn your craft. Read more. Write more. Try harder. Listen to what you write. Listen to how people really talk. Try to write for the world and not just for your clients. Don't write anything down until you have an "idea". Polish your writing ruthlessly. Try your work on people whose opinions you respect. Insist on having a say when decisions are being made.

○ *Art directors:* Stop trying to make "non-ideas" work. Insist on the best thinking before executing. Stop trying to save the day with design. Get really tough. Be great thinkers, not great "savers". Don't fix; collaborate.

○ *Ad agencies:* Set up training programs for young writers. Encourage promising beginners and train them. Employ creative directors who see everything and don't let second-rate work pass. Insist on excellence and reward it.

○ *Clients:* Learn how to distinguish good advertising from bad and insist on good. Don't accept second-rate writing or thinking simply because it's well art-directed. If you can't get excellence after getting tough with your agencies, fire them.

○ *Institute of Canadian Advertising:* To build a talent pool, set up writing courses for people wanting into the business, as well as for beginning writers already in agencies. Make the course matter so that graduation will be a valuable credential.

○ *Association of Canadian Advertisers:* Endow advertising copywriting programs in our universities, with instructors who know what they're doing. Give awards, scholarships, et cetera to outstanding young talent. Stress innovative teaching and thinking.

○ *Film production houses:* Hire fewer art directors as directors. Instead, hire more real filmmakers, people who think film, understand performance, have an ear for dialogue, a sense of story. The production business will need more true film directors, once writers start doing their jobs properly.

Needless to say, if we run out and do all of this immediately and at once, there is bound to be a certain amount of chaos at first. Still, it will be worth it if, even in a small way, it begins to overcome the trouble with copywriting. ■



BY TERRY O'MALLEY, PRESIDENT
AND EXECUTIVE CREATIVE DIRECTOR OF
VICKERS & BENSON ADVERTISING.

This is probably as close as I'll ever come to a professional confession.

I have never tried to put on paper what it is that I do and how I do it. I think I have been afraid to try simply because I appear to have no real system, no ten-point program that shapes every piece of communication one conceives into a guaranteed perfectly crafted unit. My excuse is to keep

telling myself "I'm a natural". But now that I think of it, I'm not.

I realize I'm the product of four major writing influences: Stan Burkoff, my creative director at Young & Rubicam; Bill Straiton, who had the same role at Foster; and two peers whose skills I hold in awe, Jack Bush and Gary Gray. It's Gary's constant concern over what he calls the lost art of writing that haunts me every time I sit in front of this 30-year-old Underwood and try to carve out another paragraph or two of something relevant, meaningful and, one hopes, with some emotion.

I don't know if I stole from these four or somehow filtered out what I thought I could do best and worked on it. I think the key, and it should apply to any young writer, is that there are those from whom one can truly learn. The trick is to shut down your ego and open up your mind when there are people better than you around. I guess that would have to be the most fundamental of my "rules".

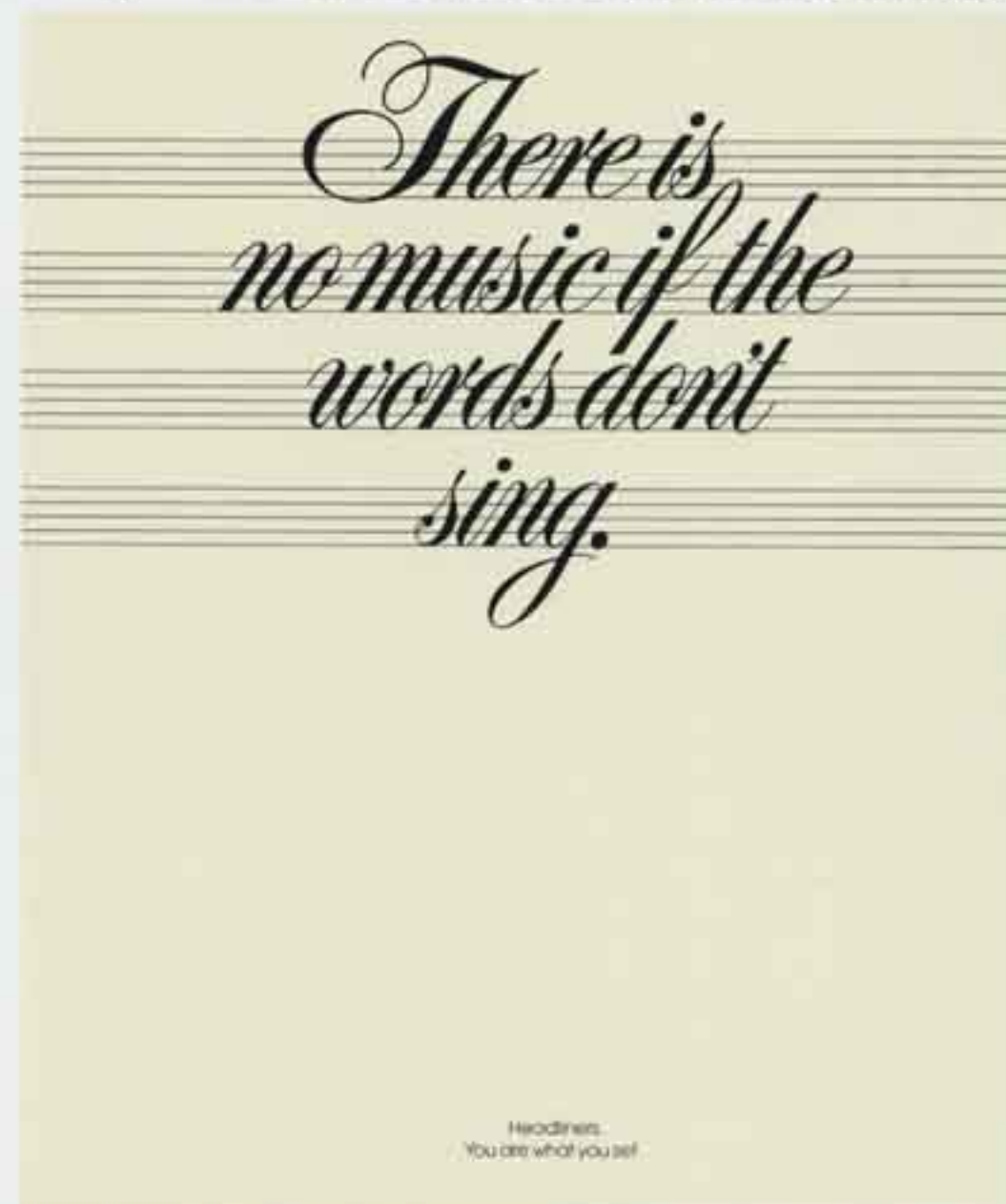
So how do I write? Basically, I work visually. I try to let the visual lead the verbal so that words are a complement to what I see. Sometimes, that visual may be only the words. I once wrote a line for John Lloyd that read "Type is art". Obviously, I believe it.

I have always been goal-oriented so when writing, I usually set myself an objective of a certain number of headings. Normally, I shoot for 20 or 30. I have a superstition about only stopping on a multiple of five, so most of my headline pages have 25, 30 or 35 headings. If the lines are coming and I feel them leading me, I'll just keep going. There is no waste. Often I find I am able to use many of the lines in body copy or come back to them for subsequent ads. I feel the most fruitful time for writing is at the very outset of the briefing. As I am being informed, my thought process clicks into gear and I begin doing lines right then. I find this helps when I come back to them because I have some starting points.

My discipline is to be as tight as I can be and work to deliver lines that can exist on an outdoor board. I set that as my toughest standard and then work out from there. This forces me to distill and edit as I go and make the communication work. (If I'm blocked, my one little trick is to turn to lines that begin with "if" and that gets me going again.)

The cute lines are easy. The intelligent ones are difficult. My greatest resentment is the truly self-indulgent heading that serves the writer's purpose (most likely award-driven) rather than the product or the service. It's embarrassing to think of the walls of certificates in this city handed out by award-show juries for advertising that has virtually driven products out of the market due primarily to self-indulgence.

With body copy, I first make a list of what I feel is absolutely essential to the message. I also keep a piece of blank paper next to my typewriter to scribble any ideas that shoot across my mind which, if not captured, are gone forever. My first cut is inevitably long. That's intentional because it allows me to put in everything I want to and still provides some space to dance a bit. Then I have a black pen that I use to edit. Once I've cut all I can voluntarily, I'll



AD JOHN LLOYD, Writer TERRY O'MALLEY, Agency VICKERS & BENSON, Client HEADLINERS.

ask another writer I respect to help me make the unmerciful cuts that hurt my ego, but must be done. Then the final measure is what I call my Teddy and Eddie test. Ted and Ed are two friends I grew up with in St. Catharines. If I tried to get one by them, they'd tell me. So my final question is, will they accept this copy, will they relate to it, will it move them, or am I just trying to "blow it by them"?

Currently, there aren't very many long copy ads. The trend seems to be toward what I call posterization. Large, dominant pictures, few words. Print is becoming like broadcast. Quick-hitting, short visual intervals with descriptors. Very little depth. Lots of flash and technique.

I follow much the same process writing for broadcast. I always start visually, even in radio. The worst television spots are those that are radio with pictures. That's probably because North America came to TV through radio, and we're still doing predominantly wall-to-wall words for things people can already see. We all admire the marvellous economy of British TV. Its source is respect for the visual elements and a development to TV from cinema advertising where pictures continually speak louder than words.

In TV, I try to work to as few words as possible and certainly never more than 75 for a 30-second ad. It's easily the guideline with which I have the most difficulty. We all like to indulge ourselves and it's nice to have those little word games working for you, but often there just isn't room and it's hell to give them up.

In both television and radio, I try to write not only to the visual sense but also to the voice. If I know whose the voice will be or what the voice may sound like, I can then try to use words that are compatible with their tone and delivery. Years ago Jack Bush and I were able to create many radio commercials for Eartha Kitt and Tom Bosley. It was a delight because every written word suddenly had sound and texture as it hit the paper.

In all media, I keep telling myself to simplify. Keep it direct, meaningful, human and real. And desperately hope for inspiration. Once, while out running, a line flashed through my mind for an ad John Lloyd and I were doing for Headliners, the type people. Usually, I have a piece of paper and a pen; this time I could only cross my fingers to remember. I wrote it down the second I got back to the Y. It read, "There is no music if the words don't sing." It's still my favorite line. I keep running the same route hoping for another similar flash but it looks like there's no real substitute for just sitting down, digging in, and working. End of confession. ➤

BY GRAHAM WATT THE PRESIDENT
OF WATT BURT ADVERTISING.

Last week, one of my seven-year-old twins, slow to get off to school, shouted at me: "Dad, I'm still standing here in my bare socks!" What a simple way to describe a lack of equipment and time. Is copywriting an art? Or is it merely a childlike view of reality, carried into physical maturity? Many people I have known in advertising creative departments have a childlike way of think-

ing. That means an ability to express themselves simply and clearly and, frequently, in an original manner. As children get older, their natural creative ability is often masked or contaminated by the thinking of other people. They go to school to learn from books what other people have thought and written. So the

independent and spontaneous ability to find the lowest common denominator of expression in a unique and persuasive manner (a definition of good copy) is lost or hidden below tons of memorized information.

Harold Adams Innis deplored the structure of modern education that the printed word created, the second-handedness of it, its dependency on other people's written ideas with no recourse or sharing of instant insight. In *The Bias of Communication*, Innis writes that a structure of communication eventually influences and dominates the communication emitted by it. He liked the oral tradition which depended, not on the regurgitation of facts, but on the sparking of mentor and student that resulted in both acquiring something new and valuable. This oral tradition is, in fact, alive and well in creative advertising teams who juxtapose the facts of a project with their own fragile abilities to create a unique and persuasive message.

It's my observation that many writers lack a formal, structured education. In fact, the creative departments of ad agencies are always the least formally educated of agency people (although they may be the most informally educated). Perhaps they lack the attention span necessary to complete school. I think a short attention span is one of the marks of a good copywriter (as it is of a child). Creative people who have long attention spans write books. Creative advertising people seem to fit their short attention spans and quick boredom into the pace of ad assignments. They are briefed, they consider the problem, find a solution, present it, execute it, and they're off to another assignment. The short attention span fits beautifully in this context.

It's also my view that creative people suffer from a basic insecurity about their abilities. I know that I do. This insecurity, ironically, is a positive force in writing copy. I can struggle to find different ways to say things because, on the few occasions when I can satisfy myself, that insecurity is beaten back for a day or two. The short project nature of advertising means that I have many opportunities to try to defeat that insecurity by justifying my existence. Again, this constant need for reassurance is a childlike quality, like the need for a pat on the head.

I don't think you can learn to be an inspired writer, be it of advertising or books. You either have the flair or you don't. But it seems to me that all children have a simpler, less cluttered view of things, and if you can somehow keep yourself uncontaminated by too much structure and dependency on other people's ideas, then you can carry an intrinsic ability to think, speak and write simply, into maturity. I think the qualities needed to write good copy cannot be learned. But perhaps they can be unlearned.

My own experience as a copywriter has had its ups and downs. As mentioned earlier, I suffer from attacks of insecurity about my abilities and find any indication of success an acknowledgment that I am worthy to live for the moment. I find it difficult to write well and, as I have an abhorrence of writing badly, it means that I sit staring a lot. I like to think of copy as a boat I am building, something which is designed, roughed out, fitted, planed, then sanded and sanded until it is finished. One of the most revealing stories I've ever heard concerned a copywriter who, when his house caught on fire, rushed back in to save some copy he was working on while his wife got the kids out. It wasn't just words on paper. It was something he was building. I have often rewritten copy 50 or 60 times. I write section by section, joining them later. If I make a typing mistake, I start over, using the rewrite as an opportunity to look over the sequence of thought.

I write everything exactly as I'd like to see it break in advertising. Line breaks may be a bit off, but generally, I try to see it through my typewriter. I realize that many copywriters now use word processors. I'm sure they're a big help. But they throw too much emphasis on the machine system for me. I have two Underwood Model 150s which I got for \$45 each. They don't buzz,

