



## Five Writing Tips from Abe Lincoln

1. **To convince, you must first understand.** Good writers are good teachers. To persuade someone to abandon one position for another requires that you show empathy. Lincoln was known for studying the opposite side of every disputed question, law case, and political issue, often more than his own side.
2. **Don't be a jerk.** Or, in Lincoln's words:

*“if you would win a man to your cause, first convince him that you are his sincere friend.”*

3. **Pre-write.** If you think you have no writing to do, take note—Lincoln's personal papers are full of scraps of manuscript in which he tried out ideas. First, writing out partial ideas helps to clarify them. Second, Lincoln anticipated the need for a well turned phrase long before events demanded it. So he started working on it before that day arrived. When it did, he was ready.
4. **Always have paper and pen handy.** Once, Lincoln was complimented on the quality and rapidity of his reply to a request. In response, Lincoln pulled out his desk drawer and said,

*“When it became necessary to write that letter, I had it nearly all there, but it was in disconnected thoughts, which I had jotted down from time to time on separate scraps of paper.”*

5. **Use simple words. Keep it short.** Now go to the Gettysburg address:

<http://showcase.netins.net/web/creative/lincoln/speeches/gettysburg.htm>

How many fancy words do you see? This speech lasted no more than three minutes—the length of a pop song—yet it is revered for its power. None of us will likely write anything like the Gettysburg address, but we can emulate Lincoln's philosophy.

**HAPPY 200<sup>TH</sup> BIRTHDAY, ABE!**

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