

Write to Influence! – Suggested Interview Questions and Answers

Question: What *precisely* prompted you to write this book?

Answer: “Scored 3+/3+ on DLPT.” You don’t understand this; neither did I nor would most people. It’s gibberish -- THAT’s the problem. This was the opening line on a military personnel appraisal – a document critical to promotion and career progression. Translated, it’s a **tremendous** achievement. The individual scored A+ in reading/listening on a defense language proficiency test, placing her in top 5% of her peers. As written, however, few would understand the significance. As written, she loses award competitions and can be hindered in promotion.

Question: Why did you write the book?

Answer: To take care of my troops. I commanded a squadron of 480 officers and enlisted personnel in Hawaii. I witnessed how powerful writing changes lives. I saw how a winning award or promotion package propels careers; helps families; and extrapolated, better enables parents to send kids to college ... all based on the power of the pen. I also saw how careers of talented people were unintentionally impeded by supervisors who couldn’t write well. That just wasn’t right. It was my “family” and I had to fix the problem.

Question: How long did it take to compose, *Write to Influence!* ?

Answer: Two answers to this question ... 3 days ... and ten years. While assigned to the unit in Hawaii, I took 3 day’s personal leave, rented a cottage at Bellows Beach, and analyzed my writing techniques. I pondered, “What enables you to consistently write award-winning packages? How, exactly, DO you write?” During this seclusion, I distilled my approach to writing into 10 tools, which I described as “Word Sculpting,” and generated a 15-page handbook. I then transformed that into a class I taught for the next 15 years because it was so popular and the writing tools so effective.

It took 10 years, off and on, to revise and expand the content of the handbook to its current form, replacing the military examples with those applicable for a much broader audience. I reached a cross road in the summer of 2015: Either finish the book or forget about “Word Sculpting.” I felt obliged to see this through. These tools were too valuable to ignore – they already changed people’s lives. *Write to Influence!* has been all consuming since then.

Question: Where did you write the book?

Answer: Well, I’ve already mentioned the beach cottage. I also spent many hours writing on a street curb outside my daughter’s home in CA. Why? I visited for a week, helping with their newborn baby. Would arrive early in the morning; not wanting to awaken the household, I sat on the street curb and wrote! I took the manuscript on a Disney cruise to Alaska. Enjoyed many hours on the cabin deck writing while enjoying the magnificent scenery. Also wrote at home, in the car, in restaurants. Might be easier to state where I didn’t write!

Question: Your acknowledgment page mentions, “Mrs. Gelwicks.” Who was she?

Answer: Kathleen Gelwicks was my 7th grade English teacher, whom I adored. She was precise, demanding, and no-nonsense in her instruction. It was she who taught me to love grammar through sentence diagraming. That solid foundation enabled me to learn and love other languages, as well, and subsequently had a direct bearing on my Air Force career.

Question: What other languages have you studied?

Answer: German, Spanish, Latin, Russian, Bulgarian, Turkish, and French. Of course, several of these are a tad rusty and require brushing up before I can engage in conversation.

Question: Can you share some background stories to the book?

Answer: Certainly!

1. Mrs. Gelwicks. I was assigned to the Pentagon as a major when I first realized that I could write winning packages. Earned the nickname, “Major with the Silver Pen.” I attributed this ability to Mrs. Gelwicks and wanted to thank her. I contacted her husband to arrange a visit. He explained that she had suffered a stroke but was recovering and able to understand and speak a bit.

I brought a picture of myself in 7th grade to help her remember me (we all changed a great deal, hadn’t we?!). She remembered immediately. I explained how it was **she** who had made such a difference in the lives of many Air Force people for whom I’d written award and promotion packages – people she didn’t even know. Because, were it not for her, I couldn’t have written them. Following that visit, I cried all the way home. Good thing traffic on the beltway was significantly lighter in those days!

2. CGO (Company Grade Officer) of the Year Award. This occurred at my unit in Hawaii. I received an award nomination for one of my most talented captains to compete in the annual All Air Force Hawaii Awards – this was a big deal. However, the single-page nomination was absolutely horrid! So horrid, I called the author to my office and cautiously made a proposition: If he would allow me to use that page in the hand book and the class I taught regularly as an example of how NOT to write – I’d give him private lessons! Thankfully, he took this in good cheer. I taught that page for the next 15 years. The graduation exercise in *Write to Influence!* is based upon it, as well.

3. When I took command of that same unit, we were the most losing unit on Oahu for the quarterly and annual All Air Force Hawaii Awards. A cherished memory to this day is the first time we swept all of the award categories ... took **all** the awards, beating all of the other units ... because my troops had learned to write! You should have heard the shouts and banging of spoons on tables when that final category was announced! The room erupted in jubilation! We finally arrived and were in the game to stay!

Question: How are you certain your writing tools and strategies work?

Answer: Well, the last story is one demonstration and that wasn't the only time we swept the All Air Force Hawaii Awards! Over the years, many people stopped me in hallways simply to say, "Thank you! If it weren't for you and Word Sculpting, I wouldn't have" Specifics included "received the scholarship," "been accepted into Officer Training School," "received the Congressional Fellowship," and others ... all of which were highly competitive and life changing opportunities.

Question: You really are passionate about writing, why?

Answer: It's fun! Applying the tools and strategies in *Write to Influence!* is like a game. Find words to delete to make the text more powerful – that's an Easter egg hunt. Determine how to make the story more robust, adding details to make the story pop. That's painting. Determine the message you need to communicate: Know your audience and intended goal. Depending on the task at hand, that can be poker! Bring wordy, fuzzy text into sharp focus. That's photography. Of course, the end game is the objective, whether personal advancement, furthering a subordinate's career, or achieving or contributing to an organizational mission. That's pure satisfaction.

Question: Any final thoughts you'd like to share?

Answer: Yes, thank you. The realization that powerful writing changes lives actually changed my own life. I know that *Write to Influence!* will change others' lives as well. Thank you for this opportunity today.