

Write to Influence! Personal Appraisals, Resumes, Awards, Grants, Scholarships, Bid Proposals, Web Pages, Marketing, and More. Carla D. Bass. Marshall, VA, Orlean Press. 2016. 286 pages.

Reviewed by Col (USAF, Ret) Robert G. Stiegel, a faculty member at the National Intelligence University's Anthony G. Oettinger School of Science and Technology Intelligence with over 35 years in the Intelligence Community.

Colonel (USAF, Ret) Carla Bass' new book, *Write to Influence!* is the latest in a series of works she has dedicated to improving the quality of writing in formal and informal correspondence. Promoting effective writing has been a passion for Col Bass throughout her long and successful career in the Air Force. I well remember getting a copy of her first handbook, "Word Sculpting," as an Air Force junior officer in the late 1980s. Her initial focus had been to improve performance reports and award packages to help supervisors take better care of their people. This latest book brings these topics up to date, and adds guidance for a large variety of the kind of written communications that matter in today's public, private, and academic sectors.

I believe that *Write to Influence!* is an excellent instructional guide to practical and effective writing for the modern government, private sector, and academic writer. Carla Bass provides realistic and useful examples of the clear, concise, and persuasive style of writing she espouses, along with numerous exercises for writers to use for practice. She shows how effective writing is essential to success across a wide range of activities, to include smart use of new media. The book does not get bogged down in detailed grammatical rules, but rather follows its own message by keeping each topic clear and concise. I will keep it handy and recommend it as the go-to writing guide for my students.

In a world dominated by instant digital communications to include social media such as Twitter and YouTube, one might wonder whether formalized writing skills are still relevant. Carla Bass takes on this issue up front by identifying four compelling reasons why she wrote this book. First, she notes that powerful writing changes lives, by opening doors to promotions, fellowships, internships, scholarships, grants, competitive assignments, and more. Second, she shows that accurate, clear, and concise writing is the lifeblood of effective operations from private businesses and corporations through non-governmental and government organizations to the military. A particularly important observation is that new media such as the Internet actually make persuasive writing much more powerful by quickly reaching a wider audience. Third, Col Bass asserts that students, the upcoming generation in the workforce, deserve to have an opportunity to learn tools to facilitate success in their chosen endeavors. Finally, she notes that clear, understandable and persuasive writing could be very beneficial in the scientific community for proposals on program or project funding.

Col Bass acknowledges that, while individuals use many different approaches and cognitive styles when composing communications, her intent with *Write to Influence!* is to provide tools, examples, and opportunities to practice for more effective writing. The book is based on five principles:

- (1) Make each word and second count because you have a limited opportunity to influence the reader.
- (2) Empathize with the reader by making your product easy to read, understandable, and unambiguous.
- (3) Convey the “so what” by quantifying and being specific as needed.
- (4) Avoid jargon.
- (5) Proofread to ensure quality.

The book is designed to present specific writing tools or strategies, show examples of applying them to common styles of writing, and then provide exercises for the reader to complete that apply the tools and strategies. Possible answers are provided for the exercises later in the book. Bass takes pains to note that the answers are examples of what she means, but that there is no one magic way to respond to each writing situation. I believe this structure facilitates learning by giving the reader opportunities to practice the tools and ideas as they are presented. Each part of the book builds on the previous parts to enable continuous learning and improve writing.

Part One of the book provides ten word-sculpting tools, each presented as a topical and brief description of the recommended action. Part Two focuses on “Strategies to Influence” with chapters for “setting the hook,” “making the case,” and “clinching the deal.” This part is the heart of the author’s effort to instruct on how to persuade or influence an audience. Part Three examines writing techniques and strategies tailored for writing effective resumes, email, and presentations. The fourth part provides 100 additional exercises and answers. It includes a “graduation exercise” with a solution. The final part consists of several appendices providing the answers to the exercises in the first ten chapters, discussion of the proper use of common and essential grammar, insights into the challenges of editing someone else’s work, short lists of tools and common errors, as well as a list of references.

[Editor’s Note: Colonel Bass is a member of the NMIA Board of Directors.]