



All Ears English Episode 218:

Learn Three Ways to Write Like a Pro in American English with All Ears English Insider, Jay Bethke

Lindsay: This is an All Ears English Podcast, Episode 218: “Learn Three Ways to Write Like a Pro in American English with All Ears English Insider Jay Bethke.”

[Instrumental]

Gabby: Welcome to the All Ears English Podcast, where you’ll finally get real, native English conversation with your hosts, Lindsay McMahon, the ‘English Adventurer’ and Gabby Wallace, the ‘Language Angel’, from Boston, USA.

[Instrumental]

Lindsay: In today’s episode, you’re gonna (going to) get to see who is behind the All Ears English blog and our guest today is going to show you three ways to write with success in American English.

[Instrumental]

Lindsay: I know you’re busy. You work all day and then you come home. You don’t have time to get on the train or get in your car and go to an English school. So if you want to get better, you wanna (want to) learn online with a



native-speaking tutor, the best way to do that is go to AllEarsEnglish.com/iTalki. Buy your first lesson and then we'll give you ten US dollars to apply to your next lesson. That's awesome. So go on over to AllEarsEnglish.com/i-T-a-l-k-i. Go to Italki.

[Instrumental]

Lindsay: Hey, guys. How are you doing today? Welcome! I am here today with a very special guest. Today we are gonna (going to) pull back the curtain on All Ears English. We're gonna (going to) show you who is behind the scenes. Today we have Jay Bethke. He's a freelance writer and he's the blog writer for All Ears English. And he's based in South Dakota. Jay, how are you doing and welcome.

Jay: I'm, I'm doing great. How are things out there?

Lindsay: Awesome. Very good.

Jay: Awesome.

Lindsay: It's getting chilly here in Boston. How 'bout (about) in South Dakota?

Jay: Oh, it's cold. The winter is just about upon us. Yeah.

Lindsay: I can imagine, I can imagine. So Jay, you're a great writer because you're our blog writer and you're doing a really awesome job summarizing our episodes, and just, (you know), letting our listeners and our readers know what's going on on All Ears English. So I thought that you could come in today and let us know about good writing, like what good writing actually is.

Jay: Yeah, totally.

Lindsay: Yeah. How long have you been writing and how did you get into it?

Jay: Well, I've, I've been writing since, (uh), since I was a kid, I, I guess. I, I, (you know), ever, ever since I was a, (you know), in my pre-teens, I, I guess I, I had this idea in my head that I wanted to be a master of the English language and, (you know), I'm, I'm a native sp-, speaker. So I had that



going for me, but I, I really – I used to (like), (you know), read through the dictionary and (uh), and pick out words, an-and (um), I've got sheets, and sheets and sheets of paper of just words, (you know), that (uh), that I would define and, and so... so yeah. I've, I've just always been into, into language.

Lindsay: So you were a natural from the beginning or was it a skill that (like) you just felt like you had kind of raw talent and then you had to hone it...

Jay: Well...

Lindsay: ...or how did that work?

Jay: ...y-you can have some natural talent, but you do have to hone it, (you know), (I mean), you – it's like anything, you're gonna (going to) get better the more you work at it, right? So...

Lindsay: Yeah. Absolutely. And did you study writing in school, like in college...

Jay: Oh, sure.

Lindsay: ...or...?

Jay: Yeah, I, (I mean), my, my, (you know), my Bachelor's degree is in, is in English, (you know), writing. So, (um)...

Lindsay: Okay.

Jay: So, I did, I did go ahead and do that. (Um), (you know), and I, I took off with something else for my Master's degree, but it was still a lot of writing, (you know), oriented. So, so...

Lindsay: I see.

Jay: ...and then I do a lot of my – and, (you know), privately as well. So, (you know), it's something I... I do it every day, so.

Lindsay: Yeah. So this is great. So I'm so glad you're here today Jay because, (you know), it's a real challenge. (You know), mostly what we focus on here at All Ears English is listening and speaking.



Jay: (Uh-huh).

Lindsay: But to be honest, (I mean), our listeners also need to be able to write, (you know) things like emails or summaries of business meetings even.

Jay: Yeah.

Lindsay: So what I was hoping that you could do for us today is give us three tips about what good writing is in English, which might be pretty different from what it is in Spanish, or Portuguese or Japanese, right?

Jay: Yeah. Yeah, (you know), and the other thing about that is it could... you could pick a lot more than three tips if you wanted to about...

Lindsay: Yeah, that's right.

Jay: ...but we'll narrow it down, yeah.

Lindsay: We'll boil it down here. So where could we start? What is that first hot tip that you can give us Jay?

Jay: Yeah, well, it... (you know), the first thing that, (um), (you know), comes to my mind is, is, (uh), for sure being a good writer is being a good reader. That's, that's (kind of), I think, the most important (uh) thing you can have in your mind, (you know), with, with the – (you know), reading gives you the tools you need, (uh), to write. It's, it (inaudible), (uh), with the written language. (Um)...

Lindsay: Yeah.

Jay: ...if you don't have time, (um), for reading, (um), (you know), you probably don't have time for writing either, really.

Lindsay: Yeah. What kind of writing or reading are we talking about? (Like), what do you like to read Jay, in your spare time?

Jay: Well, I'm all over the place and, and I, I think, (you know), that's, that's exactly the way to do it. (You know), follow your interests, your interests are changing all the time.



Lindsay: Yeah.

Jay: Some non-fiction, (what-), whatever. (Um), I, I try to do about a book a week and so that's, (you know)...

Lindsay: Wow! Jay, that's awesome.

Jay: Yeah, yeah, but it's, it's like part of, it's (sort of) part of writing practice, too, (you know). So, (um)...

Lindsay: (Uh-hmm).

Jay: ...if somebody's able to do anything, (e-), (e-), (you know), not everybody can do that much, but, (um), but, (you know), be conscious about, (you know), trying to read, (you know).

Lindsay: Yeah. Absolutely. I like that. So, guys, pick up that book. Don't be afraid to dig into it, (you know). And, and Jay when I first saw your writing, when we were talking about working together here, I really got pulled in to a story that you had as a sample. (Like), I found myself just reading it and continuing on and do you think that you attribute that to your reading that you do because you know how to build the story?

Jay: Yeah, I, (I mean), I'm, I was (con-)... I'm sure I was consciously putting that together, but I'm sure it was also (sort of) just unconsciously happened too, happening too because my brain is just attuned to, (um), seeing language that way, (you know).

Lindsay: (Uh-huh). (Uhn).

Jay: So, so I think that's (um), that's what a lot of reading will probably do for anyone, right.

Lindsay: Yeah. Interesting. So your first tip is read. I like that. So read anything, read everything. (I mean), do you think that there is... is there a problem with reading... (you know), is it better to read books or are you – what's your thought about that? Are you a more traditional, or should we... is it okay to read online blogs?



Jay: Yeah, well, (you know), like I said, I, I read everything. I'm, I'm staring at a screen, (you know), probably more during the day than I'm staring at a page of paper, (you know), but (um)...

Lindsay: Yeah.

Jay: But at the same time, (you now), I-I think (um) anything's good. Anything's better than nothing. (Um), and like I say, you gotta (got to) follow your taste and they're changing so you're gonna (going to) move around regardless if you're, if you are just, if your head is into reading in general, so.

Lindsay: Yeah, so the point is just finding material that you like, right, and then...

Jay: Following your passions, following your interests. Yep, yep.

Lindsay: Yeah, murder mystery, or drama, or love stories [crosstalk], whatever it is guys.

Jay: We live such a great time` when there is so much out there to read. There is so much available to us, we could never get to it all. (You know), we can't even [audio glitch] into, so.

Lindsay: Yeah. (I mean), Jay, I think that's part of the problem here is that we feel inundated with materials. I do.

Jay: (Uhn).

Lindsay: (You know), I – what do I read? I could read everything. If I go on Facebook, (you know), there's like 100 links to different articles, and it's overwhelming.

Jay: Yeah. Well, you gotta (got to) – it's, (you know), just like anything else in life, I, I suppose you just need to (sort of) take a moment and, and set yourself aside and think for a moment, 'What, what is the best thing for me to do today,' (you know).

Lindsay: Exactly. Okay. So that's great. So read more. What's number two?



Jay: Number two, (um), (uh), I'll call 'beauty with economy'. So what I, what I mean by 'economy' is, is a, a sense of careful use of resources. So, (um), striving to say as much as possible with as few words as possible, right. (Uh) because...

Lindsay: Oh, yeah.

Jay: ...(you know), because we live in the age of the internet, right. So, (um), people are skimming, rather than reading really dense things. So you, (you know), if you have a really, a bunch of really thick paragraphs, you – people aren't gonna (going to) wanna (want to) read that right. So, (um)...

Lindsay: Right.

Jay: ...you, you want to (um), (you know), (sort of) avoid what we call in English, (you know), purple prose or flowery language. [crosstalk]...

Lindsay: (Uhn).

Jay: ...lots of long-winded, wordy language that...

Lindsay: Purple prose, did you say?

Jay: Yeah, yeah.

Lindsay: Interesting. I've never heard that term before.

Jay: You've heard of flowery language before.

Lindsay: Yeah. Sure, sure.

Jay: (Um), but, but, (you know), just lots of long-winded words that don't end up really saying anything or very much, (you know), (um)...

Lindsay: Right. (Uh-huh).

Jay: So...

Lindsay: ...(uh-huh).



Jay: ...(you now), because you, you want to use just a few potent words, (um), and be concise, (you know), because the world's busy. People got other things to do, (um), and, and I think that's just a (kind of) a general good practice for, for this, this modern (sort of) age that we're in and that we're moving into more and more it seems.

Lindsay: Yeah. Yeah. And this is, this is why I wanted to talk to you today and have you on the show at this point. Because (you know), I've worked with some students in, (uh), some parts of western Europe especially where I think good writing in Spain or in (um), Brazil, in Latin America, or in Italy, is more flowery, I think. Maybe you guys can let us know what you think. but the longer sentences, that's actually better writing in parts of, in other parts of the world, whereas here, (right), as you just said Jay, it's about (s-), having powerful sentences, but short and sweet.

Jay: (Uh-huh), (uh-huh). Yeah.

Lindsay: Yeah.

Jay: Or, or striving for that anyway. It's not, it's not always easy to do. It's, it's (uh), a bit tricky sometimes. And, and, yeah, I'd, I'd love to hear what (um), what people in other countries are saying about this as well because if I pick up a book that's written by, (you know), someone from Spain for example, it was probably written 30 years ago or something, and so it, it doesn't...

Lindsay: Yeah.

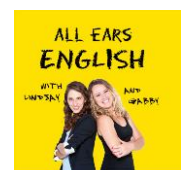
Jay: ...look like that anymore, (you know), quite as well, (right), so.

Lindsay: Yeah, that would be really interesting. That would be – do you read anything by Steven Pressfield?

Jay: No, no I don't. I don't know who that is...

Lindsay: Okay.

Jay: ...actually.



Lindsay: Yeah, he's great. (Uh), he, he wrote *The War of Art*, (um), and we've talked about his work on this show. And he is a great example. Guys, if you're looking for an example of good, sophisticated writing, but short and sweet and well done, in this short style, that's a good person to pick up. Pick up his writing. (Um), he just does a great job of creating powerful, potent sentences...

Jay: (Uhn).

Lindsay: ...and getting his point across in very few words.

Jay: Cool. Sounds like a good guy.

Lindsay: Yeah.

[Instrumental]

Lindsay: Hey, guys. Let me ask you a quick question today. Do you want someone to correct your mistakes in English and let you know when you're saying something wrong? Well your friends don't correct you. That's the problem. That's why you need someone like a teacher or a native tutor to help you. So go on over now to AllEarsEnglish.com/iTalki where you can book a personalized one-to-one lesson. If you get this deal now, you'll have a chance to buy your first lesson and then you'll get ten US dollars in iTalki credits for free to try your next one. That is a super cool deal guys. Go ahead and finally get your English corrected with a native-speaking tutor. See you there.

[Instrumental]

Jay: All right.

Lindsay: Okay, cool. So...

Jay: I'll get, I'll go ahead and give you the third tip then. (Um), (you know), what, what's, (uh), (you know), this is a really important too, but it may be a little bit abstract, but (uh), (uh), emotional engagement (right).

Lindsay: (Uhn).



Jay: So, being connected, (you know), to what, to whatever it is you're writing about, finding a way to connect yourself to it even if it's not something that's necessarily, (um), (you know), something you're immediately connected to. (Um), and, and also thinking deeply about how to connect it to your readers because, (you know), if you're writing something, it's meant to be read, (right). So you're trying to elicit a response, an emotional response in another human being with words. And, (um), (you know), you're not trying to, (um), present or create a perfect text. (Um), (you know), and you, and you do have to think about that maybe a little bit. And, it's like, (you know), (like), like you say on the show all the time, "connection, not perfection".

Lindsay: Connection, not perfection.

Jay: Right. Right.

Lindsay: That's it.

Jay: (Um), (you know), there's a, there's a, (um), there's an old, (um), Star Trek episode where, (um), there's an android in character and who writes a novel and he lets the human people around him read this novel and it's, it's a technically perfect novel, right.

Lindsay: (Uh-huh).

Jay: And (um), but the humans are like, "Yes, it's technically perfect, but it's (sort of) somehow lacking." (You know), they all sort of have that same response. And, and I think that's, (you know), there's a bit of soul missing if you're working for perfection rather than trying to, (you know), connect emotionally to other human beings.

Lindsay: Ooh, I like that. I like that.

Jay: Yeah.

Lindsay: That's so important. (I mean), that's what we're all about here at All Ears English, right. It's (re-)... it's about that connection and this transfers into



writing. (You know), I always think about that in terms of speaking, but it's true in writing also.

Jay: Right. It is. Yeah. Yep.

Lindsay: Interesting. Do you, do you keep a journal. Jay, do you write, you write in a journal?

Jay: (Um), I don't really have time for a journal with all this other stuff. I used to. I used to... especially when I used to travel, (um), I would (al-), I would take a gazillion notes all day long, (you know), but (um), but, but the journals are collecting dust on the shelves at the moment, so.

Lindsay: So, just to hone in on what you just said, Jay, so connect to what you're writing about, and add that sense of emotion, enthusiasm, how do you do that on the All Ears English blog? What kind of things do you do when you summarizes our shows? How does that, what does that look like?

Jay: Well, (you know), it does look like, (um), (you know), going back to 'beauty with economy'. It does look like I, I guess I'm trying to pick out, (um), with as few wo-words as possible, the things that, (um), are, are gonna (going to) (sort of) hook people. (Um), not use...

Lindsay: Are gonna (going to)... say that one more time. Are going to...

Jay: The things that are hooking people.

Lindsay: Okay. Cool. Hooking people. I like it. (Uh-hmm).

Jay: Catch people's attention or interest or something.

Lindsay: (Uh-huh).

Jay: Not too many words 'cause (because), (you now), that'll, that's, that's not gonna (going to)...

Lindsay: That's not gonna (going to) work.

Jay: It's not gonna (going to) pull them in. (Um), no (c-), clichés if possible. You don't wanna (want to) – clichés, (um). So...



Lindsay: Right.

Jay: ...(um)... Yeah, it's not always, it's not as easy, but like I said, sometimes I'm doing this consciously and sometimes not because that's where my brain is these day, so.

Lindsay: Well, you do a really good job on the blog. (You know), when I look through those, I say, "Wow, he did it way better than I could have." That's fantastic. So should we go ahead and recap what we've just talked about?

Jay: Sure.

Lindsay: Okay. So what I heard is you're suggesting that we need to be readers. We need to read...

Jay: (Uh-huh).

Lindsay: ...as much as we can. I like that. Guys, read anything you can get your hands on. Just start reading every day. Make it part of your routine. And then we need to try to say as much as we can, but in as few words as possible. And that's really an art form, isn't it?

Jay: Yes.

Lindsay: And, yeah. And I think – do you recommend any specific writers to master this craft of being concise, Jay?

Jay: Oh, boy. That, that's a tough one. I, I don't know if I'm prepared to, (um), to say that...

Lindsay: Oh.

Jay: ...but, (um), (you now), I've, I've got my favorites and they do it in different ways. (Um), (um), but I, I'd suggest listeners go out and, and see if they can find that themselves in, in, (uh)...

Lindsay: Yeah.

Jay: ...(re-), in readers that are out there because we've all got different tastes and what I like might not be somebody else's cup of tea.



Lindsay: Right. So it comes back to our interest in the end. And then, and then the third thing that you mentioned Jay, is to (kind of) seek that emotional connection with your reader...

Jay: Yeah.

Lindsay: ...I think. Is that what I heard?

Jay: Yes, and, and with yourself, too. Yeah, (I mean)...

Lindsay: And with yourself.

Jay: Yes.

Lindsay: I like it. Awesome. Wow, this has been great. Thank you so much Jay. Maybe in the future we can have you back on to talk about email writing or more specific topics within writing.

Jay: That would be great.

Lindsay: But for (to-)... Yeah. But for today, we know what we need to do to improve our writing skills in English. So Jay, do you have a blog, like a place that our listeners could find you online?

Jay: No, I, I don't have a blog at the moment. I, I, a, am in between blogs at the moment.

Lindsay: Okay.

Jay: But (um), but what I, what I'm, what I'll do is, (you know), we'll, we'll put my email up on, on the blog, (um), for All Ears English so anybody can connect with me. If, if you just have any questions about writing or resources or anything and...

Lindsay: Great.

Jay: ...we can chat about that. Or if you, (um), if, if any, (you know), the listeners are, are interested in actually having a, a professional English, an English...



Lindsay: Yeah.

Jay: ...(um), editor or writer of something they've written, (um)...

Lindsay: Yeah.

Jay: ...I can help with a service like that too, so.

Lindsay: Great.

Jay: [crosstalk], that you wanna (want to) do.

Lindsay: Awesome. Thank you so much Jay.

Jay: Thanks Lindsay.

Lindsay: This has been great. Thanks for coming on.

[Instrumental]

Lindsay: If you wanna (want to) put your ears into English more often, be sure to subscribe to our podcast in iTunes on your computer or on your smartphone. Thanks so much for listening and see you next time.

