



### Go back to tried-and-true basics

**Know the basics.** When I first began writing, I looked for tricks and shortcuts. I realized quickly that quick fixes may help, but they can't write for you. You need a solid grasp of your craft. A good knowledge base will make you look professional. Learn to recognize sentence and paragraph structure and the differences between American and Canadian spelling.

**Here's a list of essential tools:** a dictionary, thesaurus, encyclopedia, the blue book of grammar and punctuation, Oxford English Grammar, and libraries. A good friend or a fellow writer willing to edit is a blessing. If you have one, be grateful. You can use the Internet or various databases but rely on them sparingly. Poor-quality information is spreading rapidly.

**Use AI if you must, but don't depend on it.** I use programs to help with error checking. ProWritingAid and Grammarly are great.

They'll pick up spelling, basic grammar, spacing errors, and overused words. That is a time saver. You still need basic skills. Computerized writing programs differentiate between American and Canadian spelling, sometimes not. They'll correct dialogue that you don't want corrected. Do you want your street kid to sound like a Rhodes Scholar?

AI can make mistakes common to people working in a second language. If you depend entirely on these programs, they can steer you wrong and leave your writing flat and uninteresting. That's AI for you.

**When you need specific information, do the research.** When researching, use reliable sources such as The Vertical Mosaic, Who's Who, scientific papers, or newspaper archives at your local library. Poor-quality information will damage your professional credibility.