

Inside:

- 2 ➤ Prayers for Hitch cont'd
- 3 ➤ Lead Writing 101
- 4 ➤ Former *Pen & Sword* Editor Publishes Books
- 4 ➤ Winning Strategies



Prayers for Hitch

By: Tom Flannery

Tom Flannery writes a weekly political/social column for the *Carbondale News* entitled "The Good Fight" and a continuing religious column entitled "Why Believe the Bible?" His opinion pieces have appeared in *Newsday*, *The Los Angeles Times*, and *Social Justice Review*. Tom was the 2007 first prize Amy Writing Award winner and won a 1997 Pennsylvania Newspaper Publishers Association (PNPA) Keystone Press Award for photo journalism.

Christopher Hitchens had logged his millionth mile on his most recent flight, entitling him to free airline upgrades for the rest of his life. His newest book, the memoir *Hitch-22*, had just made it onto the best-seller list. He had appearances lined up in sold-out venues and bookings on popular TV programs like "The Daily Show" to promote it.

And yet, awaking one morning in June, none of it mattered. He was rushed to the hospital and eventually diag-

Many atheists are up in arms that Christians would take it upon themselves to pray for Hitchens, especially when it comes to his spiritual condition.

nosed with throat cancer, the disease that claimed the life of his father.

In a poignant piece for *Vanity Fair* about the diagnosis, he wrote: "In whatever kind of a 'race' life may be, I have very abruptly become a finalist."

Hitchens is best known for

being one of the New Atheists who have stormed the publishing world in recent years, in his case with a scathing attack upon theism entitled *god Is Not Great*. The book's subtitle is "How Religion Poisons Everything," which — when combined with the lower-case "g" in God — helps explain why Hitchens is not known for subtlety.

In his *Vanity Fair* piece, Hitchens is realistic about the kind of extraordinarily long odds he is facing with esophageal cancer, but he points

to two groups in particular that are pulling for him — his dedicated physicians and what he calls the "astounding number of prayer groups" that have arisen across the country to pray for him to be spiritually reconciled (to God)

and physically healed (from cancer). They are praying that God will have mercy upon Hitchens' body and soul, and that Hitchens will accept His mercy.

So, yes, Christians are praying for Hitch. But, no, Hitch hasn't converted. And al-

though there are a great many others who are seeking God on his behalf, he says he won't be offering up any prayers for himself. As he told Anderson Cooper on CNN: "I shall not be taking part in that."

"I don't think souls or bodies can be changed by incantation," he explained.

Still, many atheists are up in arms that Christians would take it upon themselves to pray

Continued on page 2 ➤

Christians Respond

Christians are responding to the plea to pray for Christopher Hitchens.

- September 20th was set aside as "Everybody Pray for Hitchens Day."
- There's a Facebook page for those committed to interceding for him.
- Peter Hitchens, who is Christopher Hitchens' brother, recently released a book, *Rage Against God: How Atheism Led Me to Faith*, (Zondervan). To watch the book's trailer, visit: <http://www.canonwired.com/books/peter-hitchens/>

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► Prayers for Hitch, cont'd from p.1

for Hitchens, especially when it comes to his spiritual condition. After all, it wasn't very long ago that Antony Flew — the world's leading intellectual defender of atheism over the past half century — publicly renounced his unbelief. And he wasn't even sick.

Flew had written dozens of books in recent decades, promoting evolution and atheistic philosophy. However, during this same period of time, scientific discoveries were being made that pointed, definitively and undeniably, to the existence of a Creator. The evidence was so overwhelming that the leading intellectual defender of atheism could no longer ignore it and remain intellectually honest.

So, while most of the scientific community responded by doing everything it could to suppress this evidence and discredit all the scientists who affirmed it (see Ben Stein's brilliant documentary *Expelled*), Flew lived up to his

lifelong commitment of following the scientific evidence wherever it would lead. And, much to his surprise, he found in the end that it led directly to belief in a deity.

Will Hitchens now make that same spiritual journey? That's probably the primary fear of all these atheists who are tearing up the Internet with denunciations of anyone who would dare pray for their terminally ill fellow traveler. They seem far more concerned about what they perceive would be a "public relations disaster" along the lines of Flew's recantation than they do about whether Hitchens dies in a state of hopelessness and anxiety and fear on the one hand or of hope and peace and even joy on the other.

For Christians, though, the matter comes down entirely to the redemption of an eternal soul. If there truly is a heaven to gain and a hell to shun, then the greatest imperative for each individual in this life

is settling where he or she will spend the next one. It's really no more complex an issue than that.

We know Scripture tells us that God has "set eternity in the hearts of men" (Ecclesiastes 3:11), that we all have an awareness of God and of a life beyond this one. It also tells us that creation itself testifies to the truth of a Creator, as so much of true science corroborates. So whether we look inward or outward, the truth is continually staring us right in the face. And it is up to each one of us to decide for ourselves what we will do with that truth, without knowing exactly how much time we have to choose (since none of us are guaranteed an additional nanosecond of life).

Whether he dies now or years from now, Christopher Hitchens has a decision to make that will have eternal ramifications for him. Christians are simply praying that he will make the right one. ◀

The Amy Writing Awards

Submit Today!

15 writers will receive \$34,000 in cash prizes, including a \$10,000 first prize.

Entries must be post-marked on or before January 31, 2011 to qualify for the 2010 awards.

Browse Our *Real Answers* Syndicate

The Amy Foundation offers compelling articles containing biblical truth by many noted columnists such as Tom Flannery, Gary Hardaway, and Rusty Wright through our Internet syndicate, *Real Answers*. Listed below are some recent titles available to editors free for download and use in their publications. To read the articles in full, visit our website, www.amyfound.org.

- "Alert to the World Around Us," by Greg Asimakoupoulos
- "Counselor to Lovelorn Guilty of Malpractice," by Gary Hardaway
- "Atlanta Volunteers Change Lives," by Rusty Wright
- "Reality Catches Up With Helen Thomas," by James J. Jackson
- "Author Finds Parables in Mockingbird Novel," by Jan White
- "Seeking the Perfect Outcome," by Kendall Wingrove
- "The Grand Designer," by Tom Flannery

Lead Writing 101

By: Mary Jackson

As the print media takes a back seat to web-based publications, lead writing is an increasingly essential skill. When online, a reader often only sees the first sentence of an article and must click for more. Whether on paper or the computer screen, a lead serves as readers "first impression," and must be concise and compelling enough to draw them in.

"A good lead beckons and invites. It informs, attracts, and entices. If there's any poetry in journalism, it's most often found in the lead," writes Chip Scanlan in his popular journalism blog for the Poynter Institute, "Chip on Your Shoulder."

To write a good lead, it is important to first determine what editors call the "5Ws and the H": the who, what, when, where, why, and how of your article. From this information, evaluate which aspect is most important to emphasize in your first sentence. Following the lead should be the "nut graph," which is newsroom lingo for a sentence (or two) telling the reader where you are going and giving a promise of the story's content and message. Professional journalists spend a good portion of time constructing the first five paragraphs of their pieces, putting the less interesting or less essential

information toward the end.

Rarely will a lead just come to a writer. Even in this case, expert journalists advise writers to hold this loosely. The first sentence is most often perfected with time and effort, cutting, pasting, moving things around, and getting feedback from others.

"I might write the first sentence 10 different times. Take a look at it, and it's not quite right. It's the right thought, but it's not the right wording. Or it's the right wording, but it's not the right thought," *Los Angeles Times* reporter Steve Lopez said in Scanlan's online article, "The Power of Leads."

Here are a few different ways to approach writing your lead:

The Summary Lead: This type of lead addresses the 5Ws and H (see above), with less essential information appearing in the second or third sentences. It is most often used in breaking news writing. Print editions are straying from hard news writing because most headlines have appeared online before newspapers hit the stands.

An Anecdotal Lead: Beginning an article with a short story that illustrates the article's broader point can draw in readers. An anecdotal lead must include specific and con-

crete detail in an interesting manner with the wider significance of the story explained in the second and third sentences.

Other types of Leads: There is no particular formula to lead writing, however opening an article with a question, a quotation, a punch line, or a direct appeal to the reader using the word "you" must be done carefully. These can be effective but are hard to pull off. ◀

Lead Writing: What to Avoid

Flowery language: Use strong verbs and nouns instead of overusing adverbs and adjectives in the first sentence.

Clutter: Avoid wasting space with needless words or redundancy. Review the lead: are you packing in too much?

Beginning with "It": Editors dislike leads that start with the word "it" because this disorients the reader.

Tired leads: Readers are turned off by mechanical leads. They want to be entertained while informed. Although the lead acts as a summary, it must be interesting and specific.

Stretching the Truth: While the goal is to entice readers, consider the lead a promise that you will deliver throughout the course of your article. Don't stretch the truth just to get attention.

Journalism Terms Defined

lead *n.* A short summary serving as an introduction to a news story, article, or other copy. It is most often the first sentence, or in some cases the first two sentences, and is usually 20-25 words.

nut graph *n.* A paragraph, particularly in a feature story, that explains the news value of a story. The term, also spelled "nut graf" or "nutgraph," is derived from the expression *nutshell paragraph*.

Help on the Web:

The Poynter Institute's News University offers a free course called the **Lead Lab**, www.newsu.org/courses/popular, taught by Chip Scanlan.

Participants can explore the lab with their cursor and click on "hot spots" such as "Explore Writing Myths," "Discover Lead Types," and "Refresh Your Lead Basics."

The site also allows you to write your own leads based on facts from a real story and compare your leads with other course participants. You must log in to the Poynter site and have Adobe Flash installed on your computer to access the site.

Tell us a discipling story

Do you have an interesting discipling story to tell? Send a vignette (200-400 words) about a situation or interaction that led to your discipling another person—or group of people—in an unusual or unexpected way. How was God faithful in supporting, reinforcing or extending your obedient actions?

Send stories to: *Pen & Sword* Editor, The Amy Foundation, P.O. Box 16091, Lansing, MI 48901; or email amyfoundtn@aol.com.

Your information is safe with us.

The Amy Foundation will maintain the newsletter's email distribution list and **will not sell or give out** any personal information.

Former *Pen & Sword's* Editor Publishes Books

Congratulations to Amy Syndicate writer and longtime *Pen & Sword* editor Shaunna Howat for the publishing of her high school textbooks, *Biblical Worldview Rhetoric 1* and *Biblical Worldview Rhetoric 2*. The books, meant for private Christian and home school students, are now available at www.amazon.com. Shaunna has studied and taught classical rhetoric for 16 years. She currently serves as Academic Coordinator, Director of the Classical Track, and Rhetoric teacher for The Potter's School (www.pottersschool.org), an online classroom serving families around the

world. Here is an excerpt from Shaunna's blog, <http://writingrhetorically.com/>:

"When studying Rhetoric, a student will learn to peel back the layers of another person's argument to see what's underneath. Perhaps it's faulty logic. Maybe it's emotional manipulation. It might actually be truth, presented well. But unless he has studied logic and struggled through Rhetoric, working on improving his faculties of higher thinking, he might find himself following the whims of anyone who happens to have the podium (or the teleprompter) at the time." ◀

A Note from *Pen & Sword's* New Editor

The *Pen & Sword* is now in its 15th year of publication, and the saying "what goes around comes around" certainly applies to how the editing responsibilities ended up in my hands. Retiring *Pen & Sword* editors, Linda Wacyk and Shaunna Howat, are dear friends and mentors who watched me grow up. My father, Terry Hart, is an Amy Foundation board member and Amy Writing Awards judge. Amy founder Jim Russell and his wife Phyllis practically lived out their message of discipleship in their relationship with my family. They intentionally

invested in my training as a journalist, which includes the World Journalism Institute, internships with *The Washington Times* in Washington, D.C., and *World* magazine, and a news reporting position at the *Lansing (Mich.) State Journal*. I am now married with three little ones we are raising in Northern California. Joining the Amy Foundation team is an honor. We welcome your input and ideas as to how the *Pen & Sword* can continue to serve and encourage you in your pursuit to use writing as a tool to disciple others.

-Mary Jackson

Winning Strategies

Several Amy Writing Award winners were asked: What are some winning strategies Christian writers can use when presenting biblical truth through the secular media? Here is a summary of some of their answers:

- Make your points with facts and logic that the audience will respect.
- Temper your righteous anger with subtlety and wit, grace and eloquence.
- Read—a lot. You must know something before you have something important to say.
- Send timely topics. Good editors want helpful information on subjects that are headlining the daily news.
- Communicate with editors via e-mail or the telephone.
- Document thoroughly. Don't just state opinion and analysis. Present strong research and let the facts speak for themselves.

To read past Amy Writing Award winning articles, visit our website at www.amy-found.org.