

## Simple Numbers: Using Numbers to Tell Your Stories and Paint Your Pictures [S1]

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We all know that writers use words to tell their stories. Are you aware that many (perhaps most) also use numbers? Imagine trying to write about a baseball game, an election, or the economy without using numbers. Even everyday subjects such as cooking, school report cards, and descriptions of people's height and weight require numbers or something like numbers.

Many people are intimidated by numbers. And not without reason. A fair number of writers, regrettably, use numbers to deceive or baffle their readers. This seems to be particularly true in the natural and social sciences. You've probably heard the one about "Lies, damned lies, and statistics." There's a lot of truth in that old chestnut.

We'll start by addressing the "math anxiety" issue up front. I'll show you ways to break complex numbers down so that you no longer find them intimidating. Next, we'll look at a simple quantitative "bullshit indicator" that will get you through most situations involving numbers and statistics.

After that, we'll look at ways for you to use writing to tell your own stories better. We'll start by looking at writers such as Swift and Lewis Carroll who have used numbers to telling effect in their work. This discussion will lead into a consideration of issues such as the following:

- Do we really need numbers every time? Numbers vs. other measurement tools (e.g., letter grade scales)
- Finding the really telling statistic
- Relationships between numbers and words, and between numbers and images
- How much is enough-making numbers your servant rather than your master

Those wishing to write more effectively with numbers must be prepared to do some simple arithmetic themselves; however, nothing beyond fifth- or sixth-grade arithmetic is required.

I am also prepared to offer this workshop to businesses, NGOs, and non-profit agencies. Please phone or e-mail me for information about writing with numbers in a business or non-profit setting, or to discuss rates.

This service is particularly suited to business writers, graduate students, journalists, social scientists, policy analysts, and other writers who use numbers in their daily work.

### **Fees**

Hourly rates for private and small-group sessions. Workshops (up to 10 participants): \$300 per half-day, or \$550 per full day, plus all expenses. Somewhat higher rates for groups larger than 10. All workshop participants receive a free post-workshop evaluation of a brief piece of writing in which they have used numbers.