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To Write Like A Human, Read Your Work Out Loud

Kate Kiefer Lee, Contributor

I always, ALWAYS, read my work out loud as I'm writing. It's the single best tool for self-editing.
Susan Orlean (@susanorlean) [June 8, 2012](#)

Sometimes I get so caught up in the correctness of my writing that I forget the most important thing: Sounding like a human. It might feel like a silly exercise, but reading your work out loud can be enlightening. In fact, writer Susan Orlean tweeted that it's "the single best tool for self-editing." If I publish something on MailChimp's website, I've read it out loud. Here's why:

Reading out loud helps us sound like people. We want to have relationships with our readers and customers. But it's hard for people to connect with a robotic, stodgy, or awkward voice. Reading out loud helps us process our content as *humans*, not just as writers. It's also the best way to make sure website copy is written in your company's voice.

Reading out loud makes us more empathetic. Humans have a wonderful built-in empathy when we're having face-to-face conversations, because we get immediate feedback from real people that way. But we don't instinctively think about our readers' feelings when we're writing web content. For example, a statement like "You must log in before you may access this information" looks fine on the page, but it's not so friendly when you say it out loud. You might change it to something like "Log in to see your reports." Reading out loud puts us in a conversational frame of mind and helps us channel the empathy that's so often absent from our web writing.

You don't have to make a scene or do a dramatic reading of everything you publish (don't let me stop you, though)—you can read alone at home or quietly at your desk. But give it a shot. If you find yourself making edits during the process, you'll know it's working.

Want to read more about the way speaking can inform writing? Check out Peter Elbow's latest book, [Vernacular Eloquence: What Speech Can Bring to Writing](#).