

# Primary Sources

## How to Write Like a Dog

By Kim Pearson

I am a Ghost. Ghostwriter, that is. I write books and articles for other people who don't have time to write, or think they don't have the talent to write, or they just plain hate to write – some people would rather clean the toilet than write. But still – they have a story, or an idea, or a Cause – and they want the world to know about it. So they hire me to write their books. So far I've written over thirty books for other people, and everyone is happy. Life is good.

The biggest challenge about ghostwriting is that you must become someone else. I am invited into another person's head, and allowed to poke around. I mine the data and the passion I find there, and bring it to the surface so I can play with it.

This isn't easy. Your brain doesn't look like mine. In order to find the information and the emotion that I need to write like you would if you were writing this, first I have to think like you. And actually, this is impossible.

So have I figured out how to do the impossible? No, I've just learned to pretend really, really well. I pretend to think like you. And if I pretend hard enough, something weird happens to my brain and I *do* think like you – at least while I'm writing your book.

Actors do this when they portray a real-life person. Think of Jamie Foxx as Ray Charles. He was more like Ray Charles than Ray Charles was. Through the mysterious alchemy of art, for the duration of making that movie, Jamie Foxx probably thought like Ray Charles. And that's what ghostwriters do too. They're just not in front of a camera when they do it.

I didn't know this about ghostwriting for a long time after I became a ghostwriter. I thought I used the skills I had developed as a writer, and as an interviewer, a mediator, and a trained listener. Well, I did use those skills, of course. But there was more going on than I knew.

I discovered this truth when I wrote a book for a dog. In a dog's voice. It was about the dog's visits to the dog park, and the experiences she had there.

All my interpersonal skills were no use in writing this book. I had to think like a dog without them. I had to pretend to be a dog, and not just any dog, this *particular* dog. Dogs are as individual as people. There are dogs who have phobias about vacuum cleaners, and dogs who like to sleep under the covers, and dogs who believe that squirrels should be wiped off the face of the earth. There are dogs who will turn up their noses at expensive kibble in favor of three-day-old garbage, and some dogs who will learn how to roll over or shake hands. And others who would rather die than do so.

There are “cultural” differences between dog breeds. To some dogs, Frisbees are the reason for living. For other dogs, the most fun in the world is to force others to go where you want them to go, and if they don’t, you get to nip their heels. And for still others, any day they don’t go swimming is an evil day indeed.

There are some things about being a dog that are common to all dogs. For one thing, being alone is the worst fate that can befall them. But the big thing, the biggest thing that matters to a dog’s ghostwriter, is that they don’t usually think in pictures or words, like we do. They think in smells.

How to think in smells is impossible to explain fully in an article made out of words. But thinking in smells is how I was able to write in a dog’s voice. I pretended that smell was everything to me. I went around sniffing the ordinary things in my house and my yard – the dishwasher has a smell, the dandelions have a smell, the mailbox has a smell. Even if I couldn’t actually smell them, I pretended that I could. And guess what? When I wrote the story, the correct doggy words came from the back of my reptilian brain, right at the base of my skull where my pitiful olfactory bulb sits (pitiful in comparison with a dog), and I got close to what mattered to that dog. I know this is true, because she told me so.

And now writing for people is a piece of cake.

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© 2008 - Kim Pearson is the author of five books, including Dog Park Diary, and a ghostwriter of more than thirty non-fiction books. Dog Park Diary is the first she has ghostwritten for a dog. For more about Dog Park Diary, visit [www.dogparkdiary.net](http://www.dogparkdiary.net), and for more about Kim’s ghostwriting services, visit [www.primary-sources.com](http://www.primary-sources.com).