

A Primer for Kicking Ass

Being the Result of One Man's Fed-
upness With 'How to Write' Books Not
Actually Showing You How to Write

By James Tanner. Reprinted with permission.

How to write like David Foster Wallace

Begin with an idea, a
string of ideas.

Ex: Mario had help with
his movie. He did a lot
of the work himself.

I. Use them in a compound sentence:

It's obvious someone helped with the script, **but**...Mario did the puppet work, **and**...it was his shoes on the pedal.

2. Add rhythm with a dependent clause:

It's obvious someone helped with the script, but Mario did the puppet work, and it was, **without question**, his shoes on the pedal.

3. Elaborate using a complete sentence as interrupting modifier:

It's obvious someone helped with the script, but Mario did the puppet work — **his arms are perfect for the puppets** — and it was, without question, his shoes on the pedal.

4. Append an absolute construction or two:

It's obvious someone helped with the script, but Mario did the puppet work — his arms are perfect for the puppets — and it was, without question, his shoes on the pedal, **the camera mounted on a tripod, mops moved out of frame.**

5. Paralell-o-rize your structure (turn one noun into two):

It's obvious someone helped with the script, but Mario did **the choreography and** the puppet work — his arms and fingers are perfect for the puppets — and it was, without question, his shoes on the pedal, the camera mounted on a tripod, mops **and buckets** moved out of frame.

6. Adjectival phrases: lots of them.

It's obvious someone helped with the script, but Mario did the choreography and **most of** the puppet work — his **little S-shaped** arms and **curved** fingers are perfect for the **standard big-headed** political puppets — and it was, without question, his **little square** shoes on the pedal, the camera mounted on a tripod, mops and **dull-gray janitorial** buckets moved out of frame.

7. Throw in an adverb or two:

It's obvious someone helped with the script, but Mario did the choreography and most of the puppet work **personally** — his little S-shaped arms and curved fingers are perfect for the standard big-headed political puppets — and it was, without question, his little square shoes on the pedal, the camera mounted on a tripod, mops and dull-gray janitorial buckets **carefully** moved out of frame.

8. Elaboration

It's obvious someone else **had a hand** in the **screenplay**, but Mario did the choreography and most of the puppet-work personally — his little S-shaped arms and curved fingers are perfect **for the forward curve from body to snout** of a standard big-headed political puppet — and it was, without question, Mario's little square shoes on the pedal, the camera mounted on a tripod **across the over lit closet**, mops and dull-gray janitorial buckets carefully moved out **past the frame's borders on either side of the little velvet stage.**

Now you.