



By Joe Byerly

Many view writing for publication in the military as an opportunity to help others with their leadership approaches, inform them on some academic topic they learned about in grad school, or to share lessons learned from a recent training exercise. While this motivation to publish is respectable, it represents a mindset that prevents a lot of people from getting their thoughts out there.

When we approach writing with the impetus being we're doing it to inform others, we open the door for self-doubt to creep in, followed by its friend: excuses. In the beginning, I didn't write because I didn't feel like I had enough experience or enough subject matter expertise to share my ideas, therefore I didn't even attempt to put pen to paper or finger to keyboard. Why even bother writing an article until you get enough leadership experience or enough operational experience?

Over the years, I've learned that "enough" is always a moving target.

Honestly, it took some maturity to figure out that the best approach to writing is to write for yourself. I write for me. Yes, I understand that others are going to read it because it's on a website, but I don't do it for you, I do it for me. In the last year, I've written about [taking advantage of time during COVID-19](#), [the dangers of ego](#), and [getting wrapped around the axle with social media](#) because these are all things I've been working through in my own mind.

## Crystalizing thoughts

Each day we have between 50,000-60,000 thoughts swirling around inside of our heads. We think we understand them, but in reality we don't. Many of us stay distracted by social media, TV, and other external stimuli that prevent us from spending time with our thoughts.

We have to be deliberate about reaching in, grabbing a thought and examining it before we truly understand it. If you don't believe me, sit down and write down one of those thoughts swirling around in your head on a piece of paper. Most likely it will be incomplete. Maybe it was something that made sense to you on the surface, but now that you're looking at it, you're not so sure anymore.

## Exploring knowledge gaps

The act of writing has helped me look at an idea from multiple angles. Once I see the thoughts crystalized on paper, I'm in a much better place to make sense of them. Some of them, I've learned, required more research. Maybe they were incomplete because of a knowledge gap, so I sought out a book, a few articles, or maybe a podcast to gain a better understanding of the topic. Through writing, I could see a complete idea in front of me, thus helping me actually understand it vice allowing it to sit unexamined in my head.

Or, maybe I needed to do more reflection to understand it. For instance, when I wrote the article about our biased outlooks based on social posts, I was trying to understand why I was getting so upset about what others were posting on Twitter. I never would have been able to dig down to the roots of my emotions if I wouldn't have taken the time to work those ideas out on paper.

## Don't let great ideas escape!

Writing our thoughts down also helps us remember fleeting great ideas. I've learned that if I don't immediately capture one of these ideas in a notebook, it might not come back to me. I'm not the only one who thinks this way. I recently interviewed WWE Hall of Famer Diamond Dallas Page who said it way more simpler than I could, he said he tells people all the time, "Don't think it, ink it." He shared that the idea for the character of Diamond Dallas Page came to him randomly one night and he admits that if he wouldn't have written it down on a piece of paper, he might never have gotten into the world of professional wrestling.

## Write for you

If you find yourself like I once did, with a voice in your head telling you not to write because you don't have the experience, maturity, or expertise, do it anyways. Trust me, that voice won't get better with more experience, maturity, or expertise.

Don't think about writing to inform others, think about writing for yourself, and then, once you are done flushing your ideas out on paper, think about sharing them. Maybe someone else out there has been wrestling with the same ideas and in reading your post can gain clarity on a topic. Personally, I write to understand, and once I feel a little more comfortable with it, I share it with you. Not to change your mind, but just to see if you're interested in thinking about what I've been thinking about.

*Joe Byerly is an active duty Army officer and Non-Resident Fellow at the Modern War Institute. He's also the founder of From the Green Notebook. Listen to him on [The Podcast](#), sign-up for [his reading list email](#), or connect with him on [LinkedIn](#).*

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