Raising the Bar on Polymer in Print

> *The craft world is not about writing ...*
> *But it is about quality and what is printed does reflect on the medium.*

Typical craft writing is casual, accessible, and focused on the work. Great. But art as well as writing is about communication. Every element you work with in a piece communicates something. Ideally you address all the elements ... color, form, lines, repetition, focal points, engineering, wearability (if applicable), etc. So, why write about good art but not with good writing? Will the art be seen as professional if the writing is not professional?

To some extent, polymer is still struggling to be considered a professional fine art material at the same level as ceramics, metals, wood, glass etc. The printed material is part of that perception so let's put our best face forward in what we write as well as what we make.

Developing the Written Material

You have a basic idea of either a subject matter you'd like to write about. Where do you go from here?

1. The very first step is much like creating art ... determine what your market/audience would like:
   - What would they like to hear about?
   - What information are they hungry for?
   - How is this information relevant to their lives or how can it solve a problem or make life easier for them?
2. Research—it's a rare article that doesn't need or won't benefit from a little research. Even if it's your own idea or technique, finding background on the basics behind it, history of a concept/imagery or a scientific explanation for the engineering or process will anchor your ideas in the reader's mind.
3. Just write—
   - When you sit down to create the text, don't try to get it all down, complete and perfect the first time.
   - Don't start writing the introduction first. How to start the piece often only becomes obvious after you have gotten into the meat of the piece.
   - If you are writing a conclusion paragraph or statement make it the very last thing you do after re-writing and editing everything else.
4. Organize your material. You can do this in two ways:

- Create a final outline from your text. If you can't create a cohesive outline, then you don't have a well-organized, cohesive, and—not likely--easy to follow work. Reorganize your material as well as adding and deleting lines and paragraphs until it can complete an organized and soundly structured outline.
- Print out and then cut out all your paragraphs. You can then just rearrange them so related subject matter is grouped.

<u>Organizing the Material</u>

1. Guidelines for organizing material (These are not absolute rules)
   - Start with your most general ideas first—subjects, stories or ideas that apply to all the information in some way can set up a 'background' for the other material to be seated on in the mind of the reader.
   - Add details in layers. The information you put down should build on top of what you've already written.
   - Be visual. This is a visual medium and a visual audience. Speak to your audience.
2. Titles
   - Titles are the last thing you create. They also tend to be obvious after working on the piece for a while.
   - Use a basic working title while writing the piece (My title for this session was originally just 'Craft Writing'.) If you get more specific you may find yourself trying to get the material to fit the title and not let new ideas develop that may later reveal themselves to be essential.
3. Introductions
   - The introduction is used to draw a reader in. Make it enticing. Start with action or in the middle of a story.
   - Talk about the one thing all people have an intense interest in … other people.
   - Give them something to 'look' for in the article by making a statement (the more surprising or questionable, the more intriguing it will be) or proposing an interesting idea.
   - Do not reveal your conclusions.
4. Body Text
   - 'Show' don't 'tell' as much as possible.
   - Squash the ego--Speak to the reader's life. Tell stories or make note of your experiences only because it applies to the reader's life or gives them insight into the subject matter.
   - Keep it simple.
   - Use photos/imagery versus explanations where possible.
   - Write in short, concise paragraphs. If you are doing a tutorial, be brief in the body and use a sidebar or notes section to talk about exceptions
5. Conclusions
   - You don't always need a conclusion paragraph. If you aren't saying anything new or insightful, you are better off saying nothing at all.

- Instead of summary paragraph, craft a call to action or give direction for further exploration.
6. Sidebars
    - For material that may not be essential or fit in the general discussion
    - Information for further exploration
    - Entertaining side stories
    - Lists or steps for something mentioned in the body text
7. Writing for the internet
    - Do not assume people will read information on a website from top to bottom or even left to right.
    - Arrange information in chunks with well-defined headers
    - Be concise. The internet is all about speed reading.
    - Be casual but not chatty.
    - Text should be skim-able—use bullet points, short paragraphs, bolds and underlines as needed but don't go crazy with them
    - Use Section headers for items longer than 300-400 words

Polishing Your Work
- Proof your work
    - Ideally get someone else to proof it
    - Put it away for a while then come back to it later
    - DON'T rely on Spell Check
    - Read the text out loud
- Fact check EVERYTHING--names, dates, places … anything you state as fact that is not based on personal experience
- If you don't know how to properly use punctuation (i.e. quote marks) look it up
- Any time you do ANY re-writing, go through the proofing process again.