

Written vs Spoken Quotes

The Craft of Writing · By Simon Townsend · 2 min read

Written quotes vs spoken

Regarding conducting an interview (or getting answers to questions) via email or letters.

Yes, sure it's SOMETIMES done. And it's a sort-of okay idea for short answers to quick questions. Personally, I've never done it and I never would. If you're really trying to draw someone out - to get some meaty answers to important questions - there is a big drawback:

People write completely

differently to how they speak.

The words of an email answer to a question sounds like a written answer.

Readers don't want this, and more importantly, editors don't want written answers.

Words spoken to you, in person or (as satisfactorily) over the phone, sound more real because people use emotional language and colloquial words.

Written words sound stiff, formal and "written". Spoken words contain more colourful speech, more "real words" in the way people really communicate - with emotion, passion and colloquial speech.

Spoken words are spontaneous and better to read. If you ask someone to type out a response, that person is not speaking. He or she is writing.

Written quotes SOUND like written quotes. Well thought-out, nicely-formed sentences. It is always better to get the person on the phone, when you demand FOLLOW-UP questions to bull**** answers.

A freelance journalist who PREFERS to do an email interview is, sadly:

- Super-shy and unable to conduct intelligent interviews
- Willing to let people get away with bull**** answers
- Just sheer lazy

If you graduate into fulltime work, you will spend half your life on the phone. Get used to it.

Email response

Spoken response

The Premier's spokeswoman issued the following email statement: The Premier considers that Wilson should remain imprisoned for as long as the courts allow. He believes most citizens would agree with this.

Boring, lifeless, business-speak quote ?

The Premier said by phone from his home last night: "Wilson is a cruel and despicable animal. He can damn-well die in jail. He will have 30 years to consider the viciousness of his heinous crimes. Decent people wish he'd rot in hell."

Lively, challenging, passionate quote ?

ABXY Corporation Ltd issued an email response: "Our company is totally innocent. We have not caused any of the alleged actions or alleged misdemeanours Miss Jones claims and we are considering our legal rights."

Say-nothing, lifeless quote ?

CEO Bob Smith, said by phone from Monte Carlo yesterday: "Ah-ha! Julie Jones is a halfwit and ignoramus. We plan to sue her a*** off, and extract an abject apology from this dead-sh** who's proven herself a despicable liar before."

Angry, offended, vengeful quote ?

The actress's publicist issued these words by mass email last night: "Miss Tawny refuses to dignify Steve Black's claims with a response."

Lifeless, dull, uninteresting quote ?

Tania Tawny, speaking by mobile from a restaurant, said: "Black is a rotten, lying bastard. He owes me money he's trying to squirm out of paying. He'll rot in hell."

Fascinating, furious, worth-reading quote ?

The publishing company responded by email and said: "At this point in time, we unreservedly believe this book to be a very true tale and we await the author's backup proof."

Lifeless, dull, uninteresting quote ?

Managing editor Julie White said by phone:

"Look, frankly I don't give a rat's bum. I don't care if the book is fiction or fact. It's an inspiring story of love and struggle that has transformed millions of readers' lives."

Passionate, defensive, worth-reading quote ?

Do you agree?

Disagree?

Email me please.

Simon Townsend

Reprinted from The Wonderful World of Journalism. Written in the spirit of Simon Townsend's journalism craft advice. Visit simontownsendjournalist.com for the full archive.