5,000 hours.

That's how many hours Michael Masterson says it takes to become a good copywriter.

10,000 hours if you're shooting for mastery.

That's a lot of time and involves a great deal of work. But Michael – as well as one of the most successful copywriters writing today – has a shortcut.

Mike Palmer is a remarkably successful copywriter. His skills and copywriting insights built Agora affiliate Stansberry & Associates into the powerhouse it is today.

Three years ago, Mike gave a presentation at Bootcamp where he spoke about "What I Did That Turned Me into a 6-Figure Copywriter." He revealed four things he did. The very first Mike listed was exactly what Michael Masterson says can shortcut the time to copywriting mastery.

Find a mentor.

In talking about mentoring, both Mike Palmer and Michael Masterson emphasize that there are different ways of going about it.

The most obvious way, of course, is to set up a one-on-one relationship with an established copywriter who will take the time and make the effort to pass on important copywriting insights. This type of mentoring can be very productive. But it does have its pitfalls, as my personal experience demonstrates.

The copywriter I mentored under – a very successful one, let's call him Copywriter X – would give me an assignment. I'd write. He'd tear the writing apart ("bleed on it" in his words). And I'd write some more until I finally got it right.

Pretty typical in many copywriting mentor relationships.

Looking back, I don't think I shortened my road to mastery in this relationship. It wasn't until I hooked up with AWAI, studied with them, and learned the copywriting strategies and secrets that now power my writing that I really became a better copywriter.
Over the past thirteen years working with AWAI – and especially being deeply involved with the Circle of Success program as their Master Instructor – I’ve learned what I feel are critical factors to successful mentoring. Here are the 3 most crucial of them:

**First secret to productive mentoring:**
Learn the inner workings with strategies and secrets

When I was working with Copywriter X, he seldom really told me the "why" behind copywriting. He'd tell me my copy was way off target. Or getting closer.

For the most part, I had to figure out on my own what I'd done wrong and what I was doing right. Like a mortar man in an infantry brigade, I was bracketing a target. I'd eventually get it right. Or almost.

What was missing? Copywriter X didn't give me the "tricks of the trade." Although he used them in his own copywriting, I'm not sure he could express what they were.

So when you're being mentored, make sure you get those tricks of the trade, the strategies and secrets the masters have developed and used successfully over the years. If any one aspect of the mentoring relationship is important, it's this one.

For example, if you're writing headlines, you need to know about including an inherent benefit (one of the five master secrets for powerful headlines). Or if you're working on a lead with your mentor, he should have taught you the six lead archetypes and when to use them.

Without this sort of targeted teaching, you're going to struggle to "get it right" and stumble around trying to write effective copy.

**Second secret to productive mentoring:**
Real examples for real progress

Back to my experience: I seldom saw examples of what my mentor wanted from my writing. Yes, I kept a swipe file (still do!). But as a novice writer, I really didn't know what worked and what didn't. Seeing real examples of successful copywriting would have helped me progress much faster.

Just as important, seeing examples of what didn't work could have helped me avoid the inevitable mistakes I made.

Here's a personal example: I love word play. I love "clever" writing. When I wrote clever copy, Copywriter X would redline it and say, "This is really clever. Clever doesn't work in copywriting." Nothing else.

I resented him for not seeing how my brilliance was different.

It wasn't until I started doing critiques for AWAI – reinforced when I helped develop the COS program materials – that I saw how ineffective being clever really is. Had Copywriter X shown me real examples, I would have let go of my need to be clever.
much sooner and moved on to being a successful copywriter that much faster.

You want to become an A-level copywriter as fast as you can. Learning the secrets, tactics, and strategies of A-level copywriting gets you there faster. And having real world copywriting examples makes those strategies and secrets concrete, easy to understand, and a snap to apply to your own writing.

**Third secret to productive mentoring: Support – it's more than just feedback**

The Old World model of apprenticeship was a brutal one. If you didn't get it right, you got hit with a stick.

My mentor didn't hit me with a stick. However, the quality of his support wasn't much better. I seldom got the type of feedback from him that made me feel that I was making progress.

Of course, you want and need honest feedback. That's how you'll progress. But your progress will accelerate when you feel positive about what you're doing. When your good work is acknowledged … and more important, when you're supported when your writing falls short.

I've seen this second type of support work its magic many times in COS peer reviews.

I've seen mediocre copy transformed in Circle of Success peer reviews. Copy that scored 2.7 in the first review, comes back two weeks later and scores 3.6!

While this might not seem related to mentoring, it really is. This gets to the crux of how I feel you can benefit from the best type of mentoring possible.

The best mentoring I've seen – in Mike Palmer's work at Stansberry & Associates, at Agora with their cub copywriters, and in Circle of Success programs – all provide group support.

There's power in the support of your peers. A career-boosting synergy. A richness of ideas and interaction that's hard to get from mentoring that relies solely on a one-on-one relationship. Mike Palmer's and COS's success rates are evidence of the synergistic strength of this approach.

**Enrollment Open for Circle of Success**

Join Circle of Success, AWAI's most comprehensive learning program where – among other things – you have complete access to all AWAI resources for life … plus all kinds of help, support, and training aimed at getting you from where you are now to "A" level professional copywriter quickly.
Hurry! Enrollment is only open until November 14th, and no more than 25 writers can be in any given "success circle" group.

Learn more about becoming a Circle of Success member today.

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1 Response to "How to Slash the Time to Copywriting Mastery"

Great tips for working with a mentor, Will. I never did one-on-one mentoring with a master copywriter, but I did do COS, which I believe is the next best thing (possibly even better with all the resources.)

Steve Roller – November 7, 2011 at 7:31 am