

Taking ideas for a walk

Published: January 13, 2026, 7:48 am

I was talking about and teaching editing yesterday. That is something I began learning many years ago, and which everyone who wants to communicate has to know.

Long ago, I came to think of writing as the art of taking an idea for a walk. The writer's task is to explain why the walk is worth taking, requiring that they explain why their idea matters. They must also show where they are heading, meaning there should be an implicit point to the journey in their work.

That might sound obvious, but I say it here for a reason. Too often, whether in blogs, videos, substacks or even in the comments on this blog, I come across thoughts that have not yet been taken for a walk. They are still sitting on the doorstep where they might be interesting, perhaps, but are not yet moving anywhere.

When I read or watch such a piece, I sometimes find myself thinking: I can see there is something here, but the writer has not yet decided what path they are on, nor what they hope those who follow them will discover along the way. That is because a good idea needs motion. It needs direction. It needs to make sense to those walking with you.

So, a few reflections.

First, if you are going to comment, or write, or indeed make any argument in public, ask yourself: what question am I really trying to answer? If you cannot say, neither will your reader ever be able to.

Second, decide where you want to go. It is fine to wander, because we all do sometimes, but even a meandering walk has a purpose, whether it be discovery, connection, or reflection. A piece of writing should move somewhere, and, vitally, take others with it.

Third, remember that clarity is an act of respect. If you know your route, others can follow you. If you do not, they will lose interest long before you reach the end.

Finally, recognise that the purpose of writing, at least as I understand it, is not to show off what you know but to invite others into a shared journey of thought. You might know the terrain better than your readers, but the point is not to get them to admire your map: it is to help them see the landscape differently by the time they finish walking with you.

That, for me, is what this blog has always been about. The ideas explored here, whether they be about economics, politics, democracy, care, or hope, are all walks through difficult country. They often demand patience, honesty, and a willingness to pause and look around. But I write these posts because I think they are walks worth taking.

So when you next write, or comment, remember: every idea needs to put one foot in front of the other. Take your reader somewhere. Show them why the journey matters, even in a short comment on this blog. That, after all, is how understanding moves forward, one thoughtful step at a time.