

# Writing

(with thanks to John Woodward)

# Aim

This lecture is not an overview of grammar and punctuation (but we will look at some).

It is just some ideas to get you thinking about writing, and some pointers to resources.

Writing is a life skill.

You will almost certainly have to do it as part of your job.

You will get better with practice.

You may even start to ENJOY writing 😊

# Communication

Writing is about communication.

It is about telling someone something they do not know about, about something you do know.

It is difficult because you need to assume what the other person already knows and does not know (how do you know that???) - so it is a delicate balancing act.

You need to express yourself clearly and effectively (usually simply).

Writing and speaking are different, but there are similarities.

# Know your audience

What do you expect them to know?

For technical writing, you could think of 3 levels of audience

1/ non-technical,

2/ undergraduate (technically literate),

3/ an expert.

A mistake with writing is assuming the audience know too much.

How often have you read something and thought this was too easy to understand?

# Organise yourself

Deadlines are good: they make us do stuff.

Set early and intermediate deadlines.

Make them SMART

Specific, Measurable, Achievable, Relevant, Time-bound

Most of writing is about preparation and organizing your thoughts.

Buzan Mind Maps, Post it notes. Bullet points.

Speak it, write it, type it, draw it.

A change of medium e.g. verbal to paper, or post it notes to text, can often trigger a fresh perspective

# One approach: four stages

Psychologically breaking something into stages makes it less daunting:

- 1/ Get your thoughts down on paper! Just write - do not try and give structure, do not spell check, do not be critical, just write down all your thoughts on the topic.
- 2/ Organise what you have. Give it some structure. Does it have a beginning, middle, and end (if that is what is needed). Do not add new material, you are just reorganizing what is already there.
- 3/ Revise the draft. Edit to remove weak and unnecessary material. Add new material if necessary.
- 4/ Check grammar, spell check, make it pretty.



# Editing

Be prepared to throw away sentences - or even whole paragraphs.

You don't want to: you worked hard!

Aim to write double and delete about half. This is part of the process.

Consider: is the word/sentence/paragraph relevant?

During the writing process, you may have found a better way to explain/argue something - so the old explanation is obsolete.

# Presentation

Does the draft work look pleasing to the eye?

Will a diagram / table / graph / picture / screenshot help illustrate the point?

Is it easy to navigate? Does the reader know where you're going?

Is there enough white space? Sometimes bullet points are more effective to get a point across.



# Proof-reading

Print your document out ON PAPER and read it carefully.

Read it out loud - why? (“,” means a small pause for breath, some people read “out loud in their heads”)

Get someone else to read it - use people in your class to help you. Peer review is useful. Use **feedback** on your work.

If you can't, a trick is to change the font and the SIZE.

# Quite simply...

Be objective

Be clear

Be concise

Be determined

# Writing for clarity

Have a very clear introduction/abstract and summary/conclusion

The unit of writing is the paragraph - make the first sentence a topic sentence - introducing the paragraph.

Does each paragraph make sense on its own. Each sentence?

Write sentences which are easy to read.

- Consider each sentence: can you remove anything? Can you make it simpler?
- Is it clear who is doing what, to whom or what, with what, and where.

# Practical thoughts

You need a place to write that works for you

- Hot/cold
- Noisy /with music / silent
- Alone / with friends
- Early in the morning / late at night

Writer's block - go for a walk/swim/change of scene.

Use a dictionary, use a thesaurus, use a word processor with a spell checker.

Find out what works for you, and what does not work.

# For the assignment

Know your audience: me!

You need to explain your design to me, and justify your choices.

Goal: design document, detailing a consistent design process specific to your multimedia application/web pages.

Structure:

**introduction:** general concept, delivery

**requirements:** user personas, task analysis

**design:** storyboard and navigation, design choices (colours, layout, multimedia inclusions, interaction, organization)

**prototype:** what is implemented and why

**testing:** (or turn up to the session)

**list of sources**

# For the assignment

Read the marking criteria: these will help you consider how you will be judged

**Product description - 15%** Excellence implies thorough presentation of product, why it's needed, who it serves, how it will be delivered. Sparkle: broader context.

**Design - 25%** consistent and complete design documentation. Excellence: cover all parts, justify your design decisions, use of heuristics. Sparkle: images/diagrams

**Prototype Description - 5%** how does the full version differ from the prototype and **why?**

**Usability Testing - 10%** Turn up to the lab!

**Report Layout - 5%** Spelling, clear and concise text, good structure, compelling narrative

# Examples (Chilton's Snippets)

2. [From the Bloomington (Ill.) Pantagraph]

"I would not ever want to say there are not people on our campus that at first in the classroom are not hard to understand, at least until students get used to them," Watkins said.

8. [Advertisement in the Chicago Tribune]

Excellent skills in written communication is required.

55. [From the Seattle (WA) Post-Intelligencer]

Britain's Prince Charles turned 41 in Scotland Tuesday when his flight home from Singapore was diverted because of fog.

# Examples

20. [From UW Teaching Forum, published by the University of Wisconsin System Undergraduate Teaching Improvement Council]

Operationally, teaching effectiveness is measured by assessing the levels of agreement between the perceptions of instructors and students on the rated ability of specific instructional behavior attributes which were employed during course instruction. Due to the fact that instructors come from diverse backgrounds and occupy different positions within a given university, both individual and organizational based factors may contribute to the variance in levels of agreement between perceptions.



# My personal irritations

Their/there/they're

Affect/effect

Piqued/peaked

Tenant / tenet

Discreet/ discrete

Complementary/complimentary

Its/It's

Accepted/excepted

Pastille/pastel

Red heron / red herring

moot/mute

That's not a sentence!

"Purple is a great colour for headings. And inspires loyalty."

Long sentences

- if you can't read it without a breath, then it's too long.

# End of Lecture

Resources available online