

Effective Writing Basics

Tips that can improve your writing in any medium

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Five keys to effective writing

- Put the reader first
- Use simple words and short sentences
- Use jargon only when necessary
- Write with verbs and nouns
- Format to improve readability

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Five keys to effective writing

- Key #1: Put the reader first
 - Communication = understanding
 - Write to Express not Impress
 - Use words readers can picture
 - Tie in to the reader's experience
 - WIIFM – What's in it for me

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Five keys to effective writing

- Key #2: Use simple words and short sentences

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Example 1

- Per our conversation, I am enclosing herewith a remittance of \$25 for the balance due on my account. (18 words)
- As discussed, here is the \$25 remaining on my account. (11 words)
- Here is the \$25 remaining on my account. (8 words)

Example 2

- As pertaining to the question of whether or not to construct a new storage facility, corporate management will ascertain the appropriateness of such an issue in the near future.
- Management will decide next week whether to build a new storage facility or not.

Tip

- **Avoid wordy prepositional phrases**
 - **In the amount of (for)**
 - **In order to (to)**
 - **Due to the fact that (because)**
 - **In the event that (if)**
 - **During the time that (when, while)**

Five keys to effective writing

- Key #3: Use jargon only when necessary
 - What is jargon?

Example 3

- The new FMIS system from Global provides VOR/DME nav redundancy, as well as enhanced GPS capability.
- Global's new flight management system provides several ways to navigate your airplane, including the latest in satellite navigation.

Example 4

- While the new ST7000 provides extensive memory and is extremely user compatible, it lacks the requisite capacity for calculating at a high rate of speed.
- Our computer system is easy to use and has enough memory, but it is too slow.

Example 5

- Demand-side capacity combined with transmission wheeling contracts and local generation resources will be able to meet local demand and spinning reserve requirements for the next five years.
- SMUD will be able to save and produce enough power to meet local needs for the next five years.

Five keys to effective writing

- Key #4: Write with verbs and nouns
 - Use the active voice
 - When it is okay to use passive voice

Example 6

- The company (S) sells (V) insurance (O).
- Not: Insurance is sold by the company.
- The construction crew repaired the road.
- Not: The road was repaired by the construction company.
- Tests showed the new material did not wear well.
- Not: When tests were run, it was discovered that good wear is not exhibited by the new material.

Example 7

- **Choose the right verb and the right noun**
 - Mr. Johnson ran quickly across the four-lane street, almost falling down when he stepped in a large hole in the concrete. (22 words)
 - Mr. Johnson sprinted across the boulevard, stumbling when he stepped in a pothole. (13 words)

Five keys to effective writing

- Key #5: Format document to improve readability
 - Use lists, bullets, charts, tables, indents, italics, bolds, headings and subheadings
 - The 100-word rule

Plan, organize, write

- Before you begin
 - Who is the audience (“My audience is _____.”)
 - Purpose of the message (“My purpose is _____.”)
 - How will the reader use the information (“So that the reader will _____.”)

Plan, organize, write

- As you begin
 - Assemble all useful information
 - Determine what's important
 - Choose what to leave *out*
 - Group information logically

Plan, organize, write

- Four ways to organize
 - Division
 - Compare/contrast
 - Cause/effect
 - Problem-analysis solution

Division

- Start with main idea, then discuss the parts
- Example:
 - ACME Corporation faces four problems that threaten its competitiveness:
 - Four problems that threaten the competitiveness of ACME Corporation:
 - Outdated marketing plan
 - Poor service record
 - High prices
 - Low Morale

Compare/Contrast

- Use familiar to explain unfamiliar
- Put the conclusion up front
- Example:
 - If we expand in the West we will face the same challenges as we did in expanding to the South:
 - Lack of identity
 - Poor distribution
 - Short p-term cash flow problem
 - Untrained labor force

Problem-Analysis-Solution

- Find a straightforward way to offer recommendations
- Example:
 - The shipping dock's inability to ship product fast enough results from an inefficient tracking system. The solution is to:
 - Invest in a new computer system
 - Retrain staff
 - Inform customers of realistic shipping times
 - Budget for overtime to meet peak demand

Cause/Effect

- Presents a clear-way analysis
- A-B; A-B-C-D; ABCD-E
- Example:
 - Reorganizing the marketing department will cause two benefits and one problem:
 - Improved accountability
 - Better communication
 - Problem – poorer service to industrial customers

Thank You

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