

## Think Before You Write

The writing process consists of five steps: Plan, write, revise, edit, proof. This worksheet helps you complete the first step: Plan.

Don't start writing until you've taken time to think through *what* you want to say and *why* and *how* you want to say it. If you think before you write, you'll find that you have an easier time identifying and organizing your content. Also, your finished product will be easier for your audience to follow. That's really the point of communicating. Remember, your audience is everything. If they don't get it, or they have to work too hard to get it, you have failed.

**Why is this communication happening? What is the context?** Make a few notes here about the problem or the situation that make this communication necessary.

**Build an audience profile.** You need to focus on your audience at every step as you create your communication.

Question	Notes
1. Who is your audience? (Name them and generally characterize them. Are they engineers, executives, clients or someone else?)	
2. What is their attitude toward your topic and your message? (Do you think they are agreeable, indifferent, disagreeable, hostile?)	
3. How much do they already know about your topic? (Are they experts? Have some knowledge? Know very little?)	
4. What expectations do they have? Are they expecting technical language? A lot of detail or a high-level view? A recommendation?	

**What is your purpose?** Identify your primary purpose, or tell why you are engaging this audience at this time. Your purpose is usually to *inform* (tell them something so they know about it and understand it with no expectations beyond that) or *persuade* (convince them to think or understand something, believe something, and/or do something).

Examples:

I want my audience to know about coastal wetlands.

I want my audience to understand the value of solar power and to install solar panels on the city's schools.

I want my audience to agree to support construction of a waste incinerator plant near Dover City.

**Formulate your key message.** What main thought do you want your audience to remember? Write this as one or two complete sentences. Keep this key message in mind as you create your communication.

Example: Solar energy is clean, sustainable, and locally produced. Solar panels on school buildings will reduce the amount of energy required from the electric grid and stabilize long-term electricity costs.

**Some Other Things to Think About.** Here are a few things to think about and plan for as you collect and organize your content. Always keep in mind what you know about your audience, your purpose, and your key message.

	Notes
<b>Background</b> Review your audience profile and determine what background information you need to provide so your audience can understand your message.	
<b>Word Choice</b> Review your audience profile and make some notes on the vocabulary you can use—Can it be highly technical? Does it need to be non-technical? Are there any terms you will need to define for the audience? Etc.	
<b>Level of Detail</b> Consider your purpose and your audience profile—and think about how much time/space you have for your communication. How much detail does your audience need? How much detail do you have time or space for?	
<b>Anticipated Questions</b> Jot down some questions (or objections) you think your audience may have as they read your document. Which ones do you think it is essential for you to answer or address?	

**Make some notes on how to begin your communication and how to end it.**

Beginning	Body	Ending
How can you raise the interest of your audience?	<p>← Use pyramid to organize body</p>	<p>This is where you can include a variation of the key message you wrote. Also, if this is a persuasive communication, you probably have a call to action, a request, a forward-looking statement, or next steps. (Example: When we get the committee's approval to move forward, we will develop a detailed project plan and budget for review.)</p>

