

“If the reader is to grasp what the writer means, the writer must understand what the reader needs.”

George Gopen and Judith Swan, “The Science of Scientific Writing” (from *American Scientist*, 1990)

Adapted from Sarah Burcon

Audience

Your audience: stakeholders—your colleagues and outsiders who have funds to support your work

Purpose

Your **purpose**: to reinforce/change your audience's attitudes toward the subject you are writing about, motivate them to take particular actions, or help them in doing their jobs

Who are Your Readers?

Consider:

- education
- professional experience
- job responsibility
- cultural characteristics

Primary: people close to writer who *use* the document in carrying out their jobs

Secondary: people more distant from writer who need to *stay aware of* developments in the organization but who will not directly act on or respond to the document

Tertiary: people even farther removed from writer who might be *interested in* the document

Readers' Attitudes and Expectations

Determine if reader is positive, neutral, or negative toward subject

- If neutral or positively inclined: ensure document responds to reader's needs; use appropriate vocabulary, level of detail, organization and style
- If hostile to subject: find out objections and answer them *directly*; explain benefits; organize document so recommendation follows explanation of benefits

Communicating Across Cultures

Multicultural population of U.S.

- Each year the U.S. admits more than a million immigrants
- The 2010 census showed that about 1 in 8 U.S. residents (12.5%) was foreign-born (U.S. Export Fact Sheet, 2011)

Purpose

- **Consider:**
 - What should this document accomplish?
 - What do you want your readers to know or believe?
 - What do you want them to do?
- Use specific **language** to help accomplish your purpose

Use Language as a Tool to Engage
your Audience and Fulfill your
Purpose

Sentence length

Example of lengthy sentence:

The construction of the new facility is scheduled to begin in March, but it might be delayed by one or even two months by winter weather conditions, which could make it impossible or nearly impossible to begin excavating the foundation.

How might you change this to make it more effective and improve clarity?

[40 words]

Suggestion: separate lengthy sentence into two sentences

The construction of the new facility is scheduled to begin in March. However, construction might be delayed until April or May by winter weather conditions, which could make it impossible to begin excavating the foundation.

[35 words]

Focus on “Real” Subject/Verb

Weak subject: The use of this method would eliminate the problem of motor damage.

Strong subject: This method would eliminate the problem of motor damage.

Weak verb: Each preparation of the solution is done twice.

Strong verb: Each solution is prepared twice.

Word Choice

- Be specific
- Use active and passive voice appropriately
- Avoid unnecessary jargon

Examples of Appropriate **Verbs** to Represent Your Purpose

Communicating Verbs:

describe	explain	inform
illustrate	review	outline
outline	define	summarize

Convincing Verbs:

assess	request	propose
recommend	forecast	evaluate

This proposal **describes** the research project intended to determine the effectiveness of the new waste-treatment filter.

Vs.

This proposal **recommends** that we revise the Web site to reflect our modifications in procedure.

Technical documents present information in “chunks” and in specific sections so various readers can access the information they need.

Proposals should be designed for:

- Information access
- Decision makers' quick reading
- Technical readers' detailed reading

Page design makes information accessible for multiple readers

Labels for sections and sub-sections

- Highlight the organization of information
- Enable the reader to scan and learn primary topics
- Keep the reader oriented to the topic
- Show relationships between blocks of information
- Help readers locate specific information

Section labels help readers navigate

- Generic labels (for example, Methods) are okay for first-level labels, but second- and third-level labels can be more specific and more helpful to readers
- Informative labels are “action” labels rather than “topic” labels:

Minimizing Cost While Meeting Demand

is better than

Cost vs. Demand

Section labels help readers navigate the report: Font size

Example labels and formats for 1st level

Introduction

Summary

Discussion

INTRODUCTION

SUMMARY

DISCUSSION

Example labels and formats for 2nd level

Current Situation

Methods

Results

Current Situation

Methods

Results

Tips for section label formats

- Use parallel structure at each level
- Eliminate unnecessary punctuation (colons, commas, dashes)
- **DO NOT** USE ALL UPPERCASE LETTERS FOR MORE THAN A FEW WORDS IN A TITLE OR HEADING OR ANYWHERE ELSE IN THE REPORT BECAUSE ALL UPPERCASE LETTERS ARE HARD TO READ