

Writing to Your Reader

Pre-writing Checklist

Check the statements that apply for the document you are writing.

Document Purpose

My document is written to

- report
- inform
- ask – reader needs to respond
- explain – “how to” manual, procedures
- influence

Background Information

- My reader is familiar with this topic.
- I know what my reader needs to know.
- I know what I want to tell my reader.
- I know my reader’s ability to understand this information
- My reader will need to get through this information very quickly and does not need background information
- My reader will need background information.

Writing to Your Reader

Post-writing Checklist

Connecting with my Audience

- Did I invite my reader in?
 - a. make it easy for my reader to join me
 - b. start somewhere interesting
 - c. get quickly to the point

Language and Tone

Did I...

- use a positive tone
- use the active voice – the subject does the action
- explain difficult words in their context (maybe using more words/sentences)
- avoid using jargon and acronyms (spell out acronyms once per page)
- write to my reader (use 2nd and 1st person instead of 3rd person)
- use verbs instead of changing them into nouns (avoid “tion” words)
- change bigger/complex words to shorter, familiar words
- use a conversational tone – write like you talk

Organization

Did I...

- write instructions in the order that I want them carried out
- write sentences that are short and simple (12-15 words max)

- write sentences only when it makes sense (maybe key info can be pulled out)
- list critical points apart from the text (either in lists or bullets)
- use an intro line and the same grammatical form in bullet lists (first word in each bullet should start with either all nouns or all verbs)
- use headings that summarize the text
- use short paragraphs (one topic per paragraph)

Layout and Design

Did I...

- emphasize important information using **bold** (not italics, underline or BLOCK CAPS)
- consider graphic elements such as boxes around text (use sparingly without a drop shadow)
- consider using another text colour (ensure enough contrast by using dark colours such as dark blue or dark green – try printing it in colour and in black and white)
- use a clear and easy-to-read font (limit fonts to 2 – one for headings, one for content)
- use 12 point font or larger for all text in the document (even headers/footers), use 24 point font for presentations
- use a 1" margin to create white space on the page
- use white space throughout your document (between paragraphs, after headings, when creating forms)

- use 1.3-1.5 line spacing (double spaced is not recommended)
- use 2 spaces after periods
- left justify the document
- use centre justification sparingly (don't use for headings that are more than one line - in this case, indent to look centred)
- use graphics appropriately - make sure it relates to the text, put it close but not behind it, ensure they will print well
- use matte or low-gloss paper when printing (high gloss can be difficult to read because it creates a glare)

Final Review

Did I....

- fulfil the purpose of this document
- tie in my reader's experience
- write to express not impress
- give my message directly, clearly and simply
- give one message at a time
- put the information in a logical order

Final Questions

- | | | |
|-------------------------------------|------------------------------|-----------------------------|
| Did I read the message aloud? | <input type="checkbox"/> yes | <input type="checkbox"/> no |
| Did I get feedback from others? | <input type="checkbox"/> yes | <input type="checkbox"/> no |
| Did I re-write, re-write, re-write? | <input type="checkbox"/> yes | <input type="checkbox"/> no |