



Tips for great writing

Writing ... people love to do it or hate to do it. Regardless of your personal preference, strong writing skills add to the credibility of the message you are trying to communicate and help make your message clearer and easier to understand.

With budget challenges meaning every workplace is doing more with less, emphasis on good writing may fall victim to time crunches that don't allow for enough time to write good copy, proof and edit. Whether you are writing a letter, email, brochure, speech, article or copy for a website, these ten tips can help make the process simpler and less stressful.

1 Remember the words of your high school English teacher - grammar, spelling and punctuation do count and add credibility to your writing.

2 Getting started is often the hardest part.

- Start with bullets or short bursts of ideas and just write it out
- Imagine a spoken conversation
- Try the inverted pyramid of a news article starting with the most important information first

3 Write, edit, rewrite and edit some more.

- Rest between writing, editing and proofing
- Get away from your writing for even a few minutes to gain a new perspective, see new transitions or cut out repetitions

4 Editing and proofing are two different processes.

- Edit to make changes to content and factual accuracy
- Proof to make grammatical, spelling or punctuation changes
- Proof on hard copy rather than the computer screen to see your writing differently
- Read aloud or read backwards
- Double check your math, phone numbers, web addresses

5 More words don't necessarily make better writing.

- It's harder to write short sentences or paragraphs than long ones.

6 Active voice is almost always more powerful and descriptive than passive voice. In active voice, the subject performs or causes the action of the verb. Passive voice often implies avoiding ownership of a situation.

- Council passed the budget. (*active*)/The budget was passed by council. (*passive*)
- He made a mistake. (*active*)/Mistakes were made. (*passive*)

7 Often it's the simpler words that make for more impactful writing. Eliminate long or unnecessary words.

- *Find out* instead of *ascertain*
- *Send out* instead of *disseminate*
- *Use* instead of *utilize*
- *Plan* instead of *strategize*
- *Best* instead of *optimum*
- *Janitor* instead of *sanitation engineer*
- *Apparently* instead of *it would appear that*
- *Explain* instead of *furnish an explanation for*

8 Clichés or overused phrasing can reinforce the expected and make for boring reading.

- all walks of life... leaps and bounds ... behind the eight ball ... leave no stone unturned

9 Keep sentences parallel by using the same tense or form of a verb throughout the sentence.

- I like reading books, watching movies and going to the library. (*parallel*) I like reading books, watching movies and to go to the library. (*not parallel*)
- You should give feedback with a constructive, positive and upbeat tone. (*parallel*) You should give feedback constructively, be positive and using an upbeat tone. (*not parallel*)

10 Beware of frequently confused words.

- it's/its – It's (*contraction of it is*) the day of the week for the staff to have its (*possessive*) meeting.
- I/me – John will go with Mary and me (*me is object of the preposition*) or Mary and I (*I is a subject*) are going with John.
- there/they're/their – They're (*contraction of they are*) going to get their (*possessive*) check cashed over there (*location*) at the bank.
- affect/effect – The effect (*noun*) of the storm on the schedule will affect (*verb*) games for the rest of the year.