The Klariti Guide to Business Writing – Part 1

Checklists, Examples, and Tips!

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Table of Contents

35 Point Checklist for Business Writing

This checklist covers the critical areas for writing anything from a business report to a memo, letter, or e-mail.

1. Plan your Work: Before you start determine your purpose and your primary audience. Decide what information you need, and don't need, to give your audience. Decide the best way to convey your message. Aim to be objective and convincing so that your message appeals to both receptive and resistant audience members.

2. Research: Collect and analyze data. Use visual aids (charts, graphs, tables, photos, etc.) where appropriate.

3. Draft: Don't expect perfection at the start. Focus on the content first and ensure that it's accurate. Accuracy is the most critical area for effective business writing.

4. Revise: Fail here and you lose all credibility with clients. Use a good grammar book and dictionary. Use them whenever you have doubts about punctuation and spelling. When in doubt, call on a trusted colleague to revise your work.

5. Choose effective wording: Use language that is concise and familiar rather than verbose and academic. For example: Use, not utilize; shortage, not paucity. Avoid clichés, slang, or buzzwords.

6. Watch our for commonly confused words and phrases: Many words are easily mixed up, such as accept/except, advice/advise, affect/effect, its/it's, lay/lie, passed/past, percent/percentage, personal/personnel, moral/morale, sit/set, real/really, try/try to, your/you're, and their/they're/theirs/there. Learn to use these words correctly.

7. Be precise: Use specific, concrete words. Examples: Three, not several; boat or car, not vehicle. Watch out for words such as recently, several, substantial, a few, and a lot. Try to be more exact. Give your reader a mental picture of what you mean.

8. Be concise: Avoid wordiness. Keep your reports, memos, and other business documents as brief and clear as possible.

9. Avoid redundancy: Many repetitive phrases can be distilled into one word. Example: history, not past history; plan, not plan ahead; sum or total, not sum total.

10. Vary your sentence structure: Alternate simple, compound, and complex sentences. Use both short and long sentences to keep your writing interesting.

11. Use the Active Voice: Active voice makes your writing more energetic. It refers to when a subject of a sentence acts or does something rather than being acted upon.

    - Example: Sam Grey audited the books last month. Not: The books were audited by Sam Grey last month.

    - Exception: The passive voice is fine when the receiver of the action is more important than the doer of the action.

    - Example: Transportation to the other buildings on campus will be provided.

12. Avoid sentence fragments: A fragment is a group of words that does not have both a subject and a verb.

- Example: Some of the IT staffers working on Y2K. The exception to this rule is when a sentence fragment is intended for style purposes.

13. Avoid run-on sentences: A run-on sentence contains two independent clauses that are incorrectly separated by only a comma. Instead, they should be connected by a semicolon, or a period, or by both a comma and a conjunction. This does not relate to the length of a sentence, just the improper connection between the clauses.

    - Examples: (1) The network is down; call the network administrator. Or: The network is down, so call the network administrator. Not: The network is down, call the network administrator.

14. Do not overuse commas: A pause in reading is not always a good reason to use a comma. You should use less punctuation if you can reasonably do so; however, there are many times when a comma is required. For example, you must use a comma when using conjunctions (and, but, for, nor, yet, or, so) to connect two independent clauses. And you must use a comma to separate a series of adjectives. Also, use a comma with a date and a year.

    - Example: On July 4, 1776, Congress signed the Declaration of Independence. Without the specific date, don't use a comma: July 1776 was one of the most eventful months in our history. Check your grammar handbook for the correct use of commas and other punctuation.

15. Write unified and coherent paragraphs: A paragraph has unity if all its parts work together to explain a single idea logically. It is coherent if each sentence links smoothly to the ones before and after it. Transitional words can help, such as first, next, then, and finally. Another way to achieve coherence is to use pronouns that are standing in for nouns or names that were used earlier in the paragraph.

16. Keep Company names singular

    - Example: Ernst & Young ordered some computers for its new office.

17. Agree subjects and verbs: Use a singular verb or pronoun with a singular subject, and a plural verb or pronoun with a plural subject.

    - Examples: The four workers have copies of their assignments.

18. Use parallel words or phrases in lists and series: If you have a list or a series, be sure each item in the series starts with the same kind of word—with a noun, a verb, or an -ing word.

    - Examples: The first example uses nouns, the second uses -ing words.

    - The training program will include:

    - Oracle databases

    - Novell suites

    - Microsoft certification

    - Retention of customers (not: Retaining customers)

    - Workspace management (not: How to plan Workspaces)

    - The new IT manager's job description includes:

    - Planning for new projects

- Attending meetings

- Conducting staff meetings

- Interviewing and hiring new personnel

- Working with marketing to keep the Web site focused

19. Use Bullets: As illustrated in the examples above, bullets are the easiest way to separate items in a series. Bullets make a series much easier to read, so use them if you have three or more items to list. Don't use punctuation with bulleted items unless each bulleted item is a sentence, and then place a period after each sentence.

20. Use plural nouns and pronouns. Example: All managers must evaluate their subordinates annually. Not: Each manager must evaluate his or her subordinates annually.

21. How to Capitalize: In general you should only capitalize at the beginning of sentences and with proper nouns. Don't capitalize to emphasize words or show their importance. Instead, use italics and bold lettering for emphasis. Job titles are not necessarily capitalized.

- Examples: our president, John Rodriguez. Or: President John Rodriguez. Or: John Rodriguez, president.

22. How to write numbers correctly: Spell out numbers from zero through nine; however, if you must begin a sentence with a number greater than nine, then spell it out. Write figures for numbers 10 and over.

- Examples: the first three pages, or 10 complaints, or we drove 11 miles, or She has 120 employees, or twenty people attended the meeting.

23. Write with confidence: Your message should have a confident attitude, so avoid phrases such as I hope, If you agree, If you'd like to, or I know you are busy, but….

24. Use a courteous and sincere tone: Avoid being trite, condescending, or offensive.

- Examples:

- By paying your bill before May 15, you will maintain your excellent credit history with us.

- Not: Companies like ours can't survive unless you pay your bill.

- (2) I have forwarded your complaint to the shipping department. You should hear from them within the week.

- Not: You sent your complaint to the wrong department.

- (3) Your raise was based on an objective evaluation of your performance last year.

- Not: I'm surprised you would question your recent raise given your overall performance last year.

25. Use nondiscriminatory language: Make no assumptions about any group of people, and treat everyone equally. In general, this means:

26. Don't use first names (unless everyone's name is used that way).

27. Don't refer to females as ladies or girls.

28. Don't use -man occupational titles (such as foreman, chairman) if you can avoid them.

29. Don't use derogatory words (such as gyp, derived from gypsy).

30. Don't use job titles that imply that only men or only women hold certain jobs.

    • (Example: use personnel, not manpower.)

31. Don't use demeaning or stereotypical terms.

32. Don't use nonparallel constructions.

    • Example: Joe, a security analyst, and his wife, a beautiful blonde. Use appropriate personal titles and salutations (such as professional titles). Marital status is usually not appropriate to mention in business writing.

33. Avoid abbreviations in a narrative. Spell out the names of states.

    • Example: The company has offices in Illinois, Missouri, and Kentucky.

    • Not: The company has offices in IL, MO, and KY. In a narrative, spell out all common nouns that you might be tempted to abbreviate.

    • Examples: accountant, not acct; association, not assoc.; building, not bldg.; company, not co.

34. Proofread and use spell checker: The more you reread and spell check your writing, the more mistakes you will find—and correct. If you lack confidence in your editing abilities, do it anyway (it's good practice for you), but have someone else you trust proofread it as well.

35. Turn in your report or mail your letter: If you have followed this checklist, you should feel confident that your document is correct, accurate, and effective.

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4-Part Formula for Editing

Classic symptoms of poor editing are inconsistencies in language and format, poor structure, factual inaccuracies and lack of consideration to the reader.

How can you make a difference when editing a document? We've outlined below some tips to steer you in the right direction.

#1 Be consistent

The technical editor's aim is to make a document consistent both in language and format. For example, if a function is called "autocorrect" in Chapter 1, it should be called this in all sections. Don't change it to "auto-enable" later on for no reason. Aim to be consistent. Inconsistent writing is not interesting for the reader— it's just confusing

Style and presentation formats need to be consistent. All main headings should appear the same; subheadings should also appear the same, but appear less important than the main headings i.e. smaller font size.

If your company has a style guide, follow the sections on words and formats. The style guide may need to be adapted for online publications if it does not address online document production. Otherwise, use a recognized guide such as the Chicago Manual of Style.

#2 Use familiar terminology

Readers like to understand text quickly and don't want to spend time unraveling the meaning of words or insider terminology. On the Internet, use terms that are globally accepted to mean the same thing. For example, most users understand the term 'Homepage'. Using the term 'Main Channel' instead will only confuse readers. Try to use what is generally accepted.

Another example is with ordering forms. Users fills in the name, address, part number, etc., and clicks a button to progress. Most websites call this button, "Add to shopping cart" or "Add to Order." It is familiar to most online customers.

However, If the website rename the button "Submit", it will confuse the customer. Submit implies that the transaction in now complete and the order will be completed. Your credit card will be charged. Users will not be sure what happens when they click the button. Most will abandon their shopping carts at this point.

#3 Simplify graphics

Web graphics need to be very clearly presented. Monitors impose visual constraints, such as low resolutions and small screensizes. On small screens, one-pixel thin lines and small text is almost unreadable. Use intuitive color-coding to clarify the graphics meaning. A workflow diagram, for example, could have one process in blue and another in red. Important graphics should require little scrolling. Good editing creates a consistent look throughout the publication.

#4 Organize the text

The basic guidelines for online text involve:

- Break up large text blocks. Lengthy text needs to be split into more digestible chunks or at least separated by headings, white space and graphics.

- Keep text in context. Check that content, such as context sensitive help, make sense in relation to where it is placed. The content may be accurate, but its location may be wrong.

- Be consistent. Users get confused when terms change meaning. For example, the presentation of Online Help should be similar in appearance so that users recognize it as online help and not anything else. Other functions, such as pop-up dialog boxes, should have a different appearance.

- Consider recognized standards. When users access an online help file, they expect it to do certain things. Any variations on the standard-such as embedded help or tutorial help-should be introduced and explained to the user.

- Consider Global audiences. Web writing should be reduced to the essentials and word choice kept to the Standard English guidelines. Editing should capture and remove words and structures that confuse non-native-English readers.

Why You Need to Revise 5 Times

Even though all writing deserves to be revised at least once, for business critical documents, you need to revise in detail several times.

Ideally, you should revise these pieces five separate times: each time you read it, adopt a different reviewer's view and search for different things.

1. Revision 1. Content and Emphasis: Identify what information is missing. Remove sections that don't alter the overall meaning of the document. Check that you have emphasized the important ideas, and de-emphasized the lesser ones. If you are under tight deadlines and can only give it one revision, check for content and emphasis.

2. Revision 2. Clarity: If you have time for two passes, check for clarity next. Study if the organization is logical, and that it helps the reader to understand the content. Keep sentences straightforward and use words understandable to the reader. Ensure that the transition from one section to the next is effective.

3. Revision 3. Correctness: In the third pass, look for grammar, word choice, spelling, punctuation, and sentence structure problems.

4. Revision 4. Brevity: Then shorten wordy phrases, eliminate unnecessary sentences, combine or delete unimportant ideas. Tighten up the text.

5. Revision 5. Style: The last revision is to work on style. In technical writing style is not much of an issue as the company Style Guide often prescribes the writing style. If you can use your own voice, be aware of your style and make sure it works for the piece you're writing.

… And then proofread

Proofreading means rechecking the facts every time content moves from one production phase to another. For example, if you produce it in Microsoft Word and import it into Adobe PageMaker, conversion and text flow problems will arise. (Believe me, they will!). These problems are usually caused by differences in font sets, unrecognized automatic functions, and other software differences.

When proofreading, look out for:

1. Missing content, such as last lines in paragraphs, missing last paragraphs in a column, and missing words at the ends of lines

2. Extra hyphens and spaces inserted in odd places

3. Improperly converted symbols

4. Incorrect functions, such as figure/page numbering, running headers, or cross referencing

5. Font substitutions

6. Spelling errors that spell checkers don't find, such as form instead of from

7. Faulty alignment, especially in tables and in text associated with graphics

Missing and corrupt graphics. Check graphics that display on the screen, but don't print out

Lastly, ask someone to look at it

If you get a colleague to revise it, their will see things that may have escaped you.

Want more? Get more editing tips at http://www.klariti.com/editing/

Bullet Lists - Do's and Don'ts

For many novice writers, there can be some uncertainty on when to use bullet, numbered or outline lists. This partly arises from the fact that before Word Processing came into being, most publications displayed lists as either outline or numbered lists. With Microsoft Word, you got bullet lists.

In this article, we cover how and when to use capitalization and punctuation in such lists.

When to use bullets than numbers

Use numbered lists when you're explaining instructions that need to be performed in sequence.

Numbered and unnumbered lists are most frequently used in academic and government publications. If numbers aren't essential, use bullets, especially in business related documents.

When to capitalize the first letter in a bulleted item

In most cases, you can start each bulleted item with a capital letter. As we're educated to capitalize only proper nouns and the first word of a complete sentence, it may feel wrong to capitalize these single words and phrases. However, today it is generally accepted that you can capitalize the first word in bullet lists. Grammar styles change.

When to use periods and have bulleted items end without punctuation

1. Use periods after independent clauses, dependent clauses, or long phrases that are displayed on separate lines in a list. For example:

The software has the following features:

- Content Management features.

- Dynamic Binding capabilities.

- Autonomic programming add-ins.

2. Use periods after short phrases that are essential for the completeness of the statement introducing the list. For example:

Word has a number of features, including:

- Indexing.

- Master Pages.

- HTML generation.

3. You don't have to use periods after short phrases or single words in a list, if the introductory statement is grammatically complete. For example:

The houses in this price range have many attractive features:

- Large gardens

- Spacious rooms

- Central heating

- Garages

4: When one item contains a complete sentence, punctuate all bulleted items. Capitalize the first words and put a period at the end of each item. For example:

You will not be accepted into the Army if you have engaged in:

- Criminal Activities.

- Anti-Government demonstrations.

- Violent history. Please list all occasions when you were arrested or detained.

Note: if you're creating a long document full of bulleted items, be consistent and decide at the start to end each item with, or without a period. Within a grouping, always use all periods or no periods. Try not to alternate throughout the document.

But never do this

The managements suggests that you

Arrive on Friday;

Cook all the dishes, clean up, change your clothes; and

Go back home once you've feed us all.

If you want to use the semicolons (;), delete the bullets and create a sentence.

How To Write Abstracts

Useful abstracts are more important than ever because of our ever-increasing need for quick access to information.

Consider those search results you find on Internet sites. If the first lines were an abstract, you'd know whether to go ahead and click on them. Most of the time you are taking to a site that is not what you wanted. Well-written abstracts could resolve this.

Once you've finished writing, stop what you are doing. Sit back and think about the whole document.

- What is the main subject?

- What is its main conclusion?

- What is its primary purpose?

- What would you expect the reader to do with this document?

Collect all this together in your mind and write a sentence — that is your topic sentence.

You need to write one sentence that covers the entire document, regardless of whether the document is a one-page letter or a thousand-page manual.

- For inspiration - Look at the recommendations, conclusions, summaries, and results sections of the completed document. If you're abstracting a manual, look at the tutorial. These sections often reflect the essence of the document. You can overlook the introduction section, as this usually only sets the stage.

- Avoid the document title – This may or may not help you write the topic sentence. Chances are the document title will be too vague. Parts of the title might serve as modifiers in your topic sentence, but you'll probably need to go beyond the title.

- Be specific - Make the topic sentence say something very specific.

- Avoid writing "This report describes… [document title]."

- Instead write something like "The results of this… [subject]… study show that… [result]."

- Get the supporting sentences to fill in details

- After you've got your topic sentence, write some supporting sentences. Make each of these sentences supply specific details about the ideas in the topic sentence. Think of the evidence that supports the topic sentence. Who? What? Where? When? Why? How? and how much? Offer statistics, results, conclusions, or recommendations that back up what you said in the topic sentence.

- Limit yourself to two or three major supporting ideas. You might include some of the less important evidence as subordinate clauses and modifiers.

- Make the Transition hold it together

- Arrange the supporting sentences in a logical sequence after the topic sentence. Add whatever transition is needed to connect the supporting sentences to the topic sentence and to connect ideas within the sentences to each other. Rewrite the sentences, if necessary, to improve the connections.

Your Result?

You now have an abstract that is a digest of the material and will probably be of some use to the reader. This technique works for documents of any length from a couple of pages to multi-volumes. It also works for letters, reports, articles, manuals, books, speeches, scripts, and just about anything else you have to write.

Other Tips

1. Write the abstract only when the document is finished. Abstracts written before the document is completed are really just previews and often need to be amended later on.

2. If you are forced to write an abstract before the document is completed, think about its purpose and then write a topic sentence. Keep in mind that you'll need to rewrite the abstract when the document is finished because it will no longer accurately reflect the contents of the document.

3. Before starting the abstract, make a random list of thoughts about the document. Group related items together and then prioritise the list putting the most important group first. The first few groups are probably the core for your topic sentence. The rest will lead to supporting sentences.

4. If you can't create a topic sentence, write the supporting sentences first. The topic sentence may then become more obvious.

5. When writing for an audience, remember that they may not necessarily up to speed in your subject area. This is important because you never know who will read your abstract.

6. Choose acronyms, abbreviations, and technical terms carefully as they may confuse readers.

7. Define the scope of the project in the abstract, i.e. what is in and what is out of scope.

8. Reread your abstract after several days have passed. Remove all superfluous information.

These tips should ensure that your readers get off to a good start when they start your document.

Want more? Get more formatting tips at http://www.klariti.com/blog/

How to Make 'Boring' Writing More Interesting

If you want to improve your writing, take a recent piece of work, for example, a sales letter, and run through the following checklist.

1. There are...

Avoid using this as an opener; it sounds jaded. It gives the impression that you couldn't think of anything more interesting.

The same goes for starting with "it is." Empty subjects and weak verbs detract from your work and dilute the message. Restructure your sentences to avoid these fillers.

> Not: There are now thousands of websites on the Internet.

> Use: Thousands of websites are now on the Internet.

2. Ditch clichés

Make a list of clichés that know you have been guilty of using.

Keep it next to your PC, or wherever you work. Once you're finished your material, double-check that none of these have crept in. Watch out for clichés entering your material when you are tired. Most of us tend to resort to clichés when we are low on energy and don't have much brainpower left.

Remember, that some words and expressions are so overused that they've been reduced to meaningless phrases. For example:

- Pre-plan (just use plan)

- Solution

- Seamless

- Micro Manage

- Access

- Paradigm

- Radical

- Broad Range

- Synergy

- Enterprise

- Virtually Unlimited

- Utilize

- Proactive

3. Remove Redundant Phrases and Expressions

Go through your material and do a 'Search and Remove' on redundancies. Example of redundancies include:

- Blue in color (what else could it be besides color)

- Large in size (what other kind of large is there?)

- New innovation (is there an old innovation?)

- End result (and the beginning result was…)

- Final outcome (… was just the outcome.)

4. Be selective with Passive verbs

Passive verbs tend to offer a weak, roundabout way of saying something. In general, you can replace a passive verb with an active verb and improve the clarity of the sentence.

Not: The computer was built by John.

But: John built the computer.

The active voice gives your material more authority and conviction. It's also shorter and faster to read.

5. Evil adverbs

"Rather," "very," "quite": These adverbs dilute your writing. Cut them out: your sentence will become sharper and resonate with more conviction. Poor adverbs tend to convey vagueness and a lack on interest.

Not: I was rather worried that our computers were quite unsafe.

But: I was concerned that our computers were unsafe.

6. Just Say it

We use the verb "say" so much that it tends not to register with us.

Even though it's nice to use an alternative choice occasionally, avoid using different verbs simply to get around using "he said, she said". Constantly using different verbs in place of "say" disjoints the material and breaks up the flow within the text.

If you follow these tips, your sales material will develop a style that is more confident and persuasive.

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Difference between Benefits and Features

People buy on impulse.

Buying is an emotional experience. As a Sales writer, you need to know the difference between features and benefits if you want to evoke the emotions that will turn a reluctant consumer into a buying consumer.

Ok, let's pretend that you're selling a $500k Ferrari sports-car.

Examples of the "Features" of the car might include:

1. Made by the best European car designers.

2. Includes hand-made Italian leather seats and expensive coverings

3. Lifetime guarantee on all parts.

Examples of the "Benefits" might include

1. You'll have the most famous sport-car in the world.

2. You'll be recognized as someone with style, flair and real class.

3. You'll be envied by your peers.

The difference is that "features" focus on how the product is made, while the "benefits" focuses on how your customers will gain by using your product.

In general, people are attracted first to the benefits and then consider how the features make these possible.

21 Tips For Writing Benefits

Benefits attract customers—benefits 'sell' features. Many novice writers focus on the features that a product offers, but overlook that consumers want to know how they will benefit by using the product; how you do that is of less interest to them.

Let's take an example and consider the number of instant coffees on the market.

Most of these look the same. They might be packaged differently, but essentially their just lots of granules!

But, every day, coffee manufacturers spend millions attempting to persuade you that their coffee is unique — and its made just for You!

Why do they do this?

They don't focus on the coffee; instead, they focus on… savoring the aromatic taste of hand-picked Columbian beans ideal for starting your morning… and so on.

It's not the beans they're selling—it's the benefits. In the sentence above, it reminds you how it their lovely coffee helps you start your morning-a nice benefit that we can all relate to.

So, with this in mind, let's look at some ways to convey those benefits.

1. Persuade — use words, phrases, and expressions that persuade. Active verbs and short phrases carry a lot of punch. Think of

"Just Do It"

"I'm Lovin' it"

"Coke Is It."

They're all easy to remember and roll off the tongue without any problem. No strange words or buzzwords to deal with.

2. Product — make sure you understand the products your audience is interested in. You have to know the typical consumer that you're selling to; and know their habits, new trends, and their dislikes.

3. Incentive — examine the 'triggers' that make consumer purchase one product over another. For example, consider triggers such as discounts, bonus

4. Motivation — look into the motivating factors that drive consumers; for example, exclusivity is a strong driver for up-market products, as it implies that only a select band of people can afford/are worthy etc to have this product.

5. Words — write and re-write your material until the benefits become very persuasive.

Once you have worked on these areas, ask yourself:

6. Who will benefit most from the message?

7. What are their basic needs?

8. Which is the most attractive benefit?

9. What is the key benefit in my message?

10. How to write the key benefit in one sentence?

11. How to best convey these benefits?

12. What will help illustrate my message?

Your next step is to write the "sales message" using words that will:

13. Demand complete attention.

14. Create intense interest.

15. Encourage the reader to act.

The three steps—get attention, create interest and call to action—are the key ingredients of all sales copy.

However, even the sharpest copy won't attract customers if your product is poorly presented, confusing or overpriced.

With that in mind, here are some final suggestions to get the most out of your words—and turn passive readers into active consumers.

16. Define the Who, What, and Why before you start.

17. Gather all the collateral, documents, brochures etc you need to write the copy

18. Set a goal for yourself. Only sign-off on the final draft, once you reached this objective.

19. Imagine that you are the consumer; write from their point of view.

20. Read your material aloud once you've finished it. If you stumble over any section, or if something grates, revise it and try it out again.

21. Once finished, put is aside for 24 hours. When you write for long periods, you may get 'snow-blind'; a 24-hour break will help you see if what you wrote makes the grade.

1 Minute Exercise for Writing Benefits

Here's a quick 1 Minute Exercise that will help you differentiate "features" from "benefits."

One of the quickest ways to recognize great benefits—and later write them—is by studying the junk mail you get every day. Every day when you sort through your junk mail, you are unconsciously judging features against benefits.

Gather all the junk mail that you received this week.

Quickly read through all of the mail in one go.

Go through all the junk mail, separating the interesting mail into one pile, and the others into another stack.

Carefully go through the interesting mail and ask yourself: "What is it that's sparked my interest here?" Write down all the words, images, and expressions and so on that caught your interest.

Finally, go through the stack of mail that DID NOT interest you, and ask yourself: "Why am I not interested in this?" Again, note all the things that turned you off.

If you do this exercise every week for four weeks you'll find that the major reasons you did not respond to these advertisement were...

1. You had no need or desire for the item OR...

2. You could not quickly identify its benefit to you

If you do this exercise for one month - without writing one single word - you'll train your mind to search for the "benefits" in anything.

This will immediately be reflected in the way you write your material in the future, and this means "money in your pocket."

1 Minute Exercise for Writing Marketing Messages

So, how can you apply this to marketing or any other type of writing where you want to boil down the text?

Remember Do and Describe?

Do - What does your business, service, or blog do?

Describe - How does your small business, service or blog do this?

You build your core marketing message around this. Sound too simplistic?

What does Apple do?

Create gadgets.

How does it do it?

Making them so beautiful you must have them.

What does Google do?

Build a Search Engine.

How does it do it?

By helping you find better information than anyone else.

Let's try your business.

Get out your laptop, open a page, and write your business name at the top.

Write two verbs and three adjectives that:

Describe your business and

Tell people what you're doing (two or three adjectives max)

I've created an example below to show how easy it is:

Business Name: White Paper Writing Guru

Verbs: help, write, publish

Adjectives: positive, personality, speed

The Klariti Guide to Business Writing   3/27/2014

Page 24 of 30

This is the 'bones' of your marketing message. What we need to do next is wrap a few sentences around these key verbs and adjectives.

For example:

- White Paper Writing Guru gives your sales documents more personality. Our fully trained writers will provide you with the direction you need to develop better documents on time.

- White Paper Writing Guru helps publish your documents faster.

- White Paper Writing Guru gives your words a positive message.

Instead of describing what you do or using credentials, highlight the value you provide.

- What value do you deliver?

- Why should people pay you?

- Why should they care?

How to Improve your Marketing Messages

Steve Pavlina suggests you think about what kind of conversation you'd like to stimulate.

"Tossing out labels to describe your work is usually a dead end. Instead, think about what kind of value you can provide to people."

He adds that you good marketing messages go beyond 'labels'.

Why?

People use labels to pigeon you into a career bucket; it gives them the opportunity to dismiss you.

"But if you present them with something that defies immediate labeling, you make people curious. You present an enigma they have to solve. You open the door to an interesting conversation."

Keep your core message focused. Use everyday, natural language. Avoid clichés, jargon and industry speak. And don't make it complicated. If it's too witty, obscure, or clever-clever, you've missed the point – and so will your customers.

Remember, your core marketing message is the anchor around which your sales collateral will be developed.

Distill the message. Keep it short. Make it memorable.

What else would you add? Why is it so hard to write a clear marketing message?

Active and Passive Voices

The passive voice emphasizes the action being performed not than the person doing the action.

Passive Voice

The passive voice presents ideas objectively:

   "The server was installed."

avoids using names or assigning blame

   "A fatal error has occurred."

Construction of passive voice sentences:

   start with a thing rather than a person

use a two-word verb

"is" or "was" followed by a past-tense verb

sometimes end with a 'by' phrase that identifies the doer

Reports were approved by the CEO.

Active Voice

Shorter and more direct

subject performs the action

I installed the server

Sara sent the fax (as opposed to 'the fax was sent by Sara')

Exercise

Which of the following sentences uses active or passive voice

I left the car running last night and destroyed the engine.

Verification of passwords must be performed on a daily basis by authorized security personnel.

She cannot approve your expense until you have provided us with receipts.

We made an error by spelling your sister's name wrong in the doctor's report.

The editing of the release notes was done over the weekend by the technical writer.

You failed to submit the user guide before the due date

They should not have ordered a separate Blackberry for each person in the team.

It was suggested by the Technical Writer that the project's schedule be revised to factor in new testing.

You must send a second check for $97 so that we can process your order.

The software was installed incorrectly on your mobile phone.

Deadwood and Jargon

Finally…

Remove wordiness and deadwood phrases and replace them with better expressions.

The following is a list of the 'most wanted' culprits. The "deadwood" comes first:

- according to our data -- we find

- accordingly -- therefore, so

- after the conclusion of -- after

- ascertain the location of -- find

- by a factor of two -- two times, double, twice

- come to a conclusion -- conclude

- give consideration to -- consider, examine

- give indication of -- show, indicate, suggest

- in close proximity to -- near

- in some cases -- sometimes

- in the event that -- if

- in the near future -- soon

- in the neighborhood of -- near, about, nearly

- in view of the fact that -- because, since

- it is our opinion that -- we think

- it is possible that -- perhaps

- it is well known that -- (nothing)

- it may be said that -- (nothing)

- make inquiry regarding -- ask about, inquire about

- manner in which -- how

- not with standing the fact that -- although

- on the basis of -- from, because, by

- on the order of -- about, approximately

- present in greater abundance -- more abundant

- prior to -- before

- provided that -- if

- put an end to -- end

- reach a conclusion -- conclude

- serves the function of being -- is

- subsequent to -- after

- the question as to -- whether

- there can be little doubt that -- probably

- utilize or utilization -- use

- with reference to – about

As mentioned before, an experienced business writer will guide his or her readers through the document and avoid confusing them with acronyms, convoluted sentences, and labyrinthine paragraphs.

- Simple, clear writing is concise, effective, and persuasive.

Improve the effectiveness of your business documents by adopting a clear writing style, which in turns improves your chances of winning new customers.

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PS: got a question about business writing we didn't cover here? Visit the contact us page and let me know.

Regards,

Ivan

About Klariti

Klariti develops 'content assets' using white papers, case studies, and industry reports.

We examine, develop, and benchmark content for Government agencies and Financial Service firms to support their social media, corporate blogs, and email communications.

Our website – Business Writing For Smart People - reflects what we do. If you find something there that's interests you, drop us a line.

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