



Tips and tools
FOR THE WRITING WORLD

12 Tips for Crafting Readable Writing

Wouldn't it be nice if readers dutifully read every scrap of our copy? Don't kid yourself. They need information, and they need it fast.

Your best bet? Create content that can be quickly scanned and that conveys your message unmistakably.

1. START WITH THE MOST IMPORTANT CONTENT

Assume your reader will never make it past your headline and deck. Put your main message in the head. Add context or critical details in the deck.

2. DIVIDE THE REST INTO MANAGEABLE CHUNKS

Nobody wants to wade through a wall of text. If a section of text is larger than the palm of your hand, break it up.*

3. GIVE EACH CHUNK A MEANINGFUL HEADING

Write headings that are clear, not coy. Use terms that help users quickly find the content they need.

4. KEEP PARAGRAPHS SHORT

No more than three to four sentences per paragraph, please. And remember: one-sentence paragraphs are not just legal, but powerful when used judiciously.

5. KEEP SENTENCES SHORT

Aim for an average sentence length of 14 words. Readers drop out in increasing numbers as sentences run longer.

6. USE EVERYDAY WORDS, NOT JARGON

Try *help* instead of *facilitate*. *Use* instead of *utilize*.

7. AVOID FLUFF AND FILLER

Replace *due to the fact that* with *because*. Don't *make a decision to*, just *decide*. Don't offer *best-in-class holistic solutions*. Just say what you do.

8. GO EASY WITH ACRONYMS

Limit acronyms and abbreviations lest you create alphabet soup. Think of meaningful words that could replace acronyms: *the agency* rather than *the ODRSC*.

9. PUT IMPORTANT POINTS IN A LIST

Don't bury important points or steps in a paragraph. Make them impossible to miss in a list.

10. USE TEXT BOXES OR SIDEBARS TO HIGHLIGHT CRITICAL CONTENT

Summarize the critical takeaways of a piece in a sidebar or text box. Remember those folks who only read your headline and deck? They might also read the sidebar. Make that content count.

11. DON'T WRITE AT ALL—USE A GRAPHIC

Your brain can process an image far faster than it can process text. Look for places where you can convey a complex idea more easily with a graphic than you can a string of words.

12. USE COLOR

If you have control over the design of your piece, advocate for color. Research shows that color visuals increase willingness to read by 80%.**

* Ann Wylie, 10 ways to reach more readers. Accessed September 29, 2016 at <http://wcdn.wyliecomm.com/wp-content/uploads/2014/10/10-Ways-to-Reach-More-Readers.pdf>.

** Green, Ronald E. The Persuasive Properties of Color. *Marketing Communications*, October 1989.

