

Improving your Writing Skills

Writing is a *craft*: it requires devotion, discipline, and practice.” (Dr Luc Hens, Vesalius College)

Pam Dalby 2019

... do I measure up?

What do I think about my writing skills?

How well should I be able to write?

How do I improve my writing?



Understand the skills required

Reader/writer contract

Thesis – Audience - Purpose

Organisation of text

Coherent - cohesive

Revision of text

Concise - clear



Audience Analysis Overview

To compose persuasive, user-centered communication, you should know who will read your document as your audience may have differing needs and expectations. In other words, you may have a complex audience in all the stages of your document's lifecycle—the development stage, the reading stage, and the action stage.

Development stage

Primary author (you)

Secondary author (a technical expert within your organization)

Secondary author (a budget expert within your organization)

Gatekeeper (your supervisor)



Reading stage

Primary audience (decision maker, primary contact, project lead, etc.)

Secondary audience (technical expert within audience's organization)

Shadow audience (others who may read your communication)

Action stage

Stakeholders (people who may read your text, but more importantly, those affected by decisions made based on the information you provide)

Keep in mind texts may not go through a clear, three-step process, the lifecycle of your communication may consist of overlapping stages of evolution. User-centered writing calls for close cooperation between those who compose the documents, those who will read and act upon the documents, and those who will be affected by the actions.



An ineffective message is a waste of everyone's time.

Few writers can express themselves clearly and effectively in a rough draft. While short, routine business communications may need little or no revision, most business writing—especially longer, more complex letters and reports—will need revision to ensure that you've said **exactly** what you meant to say in a manner that the reader will understand.



Coherent and Cohesive Text Organisation

Understand your central idea

Controlling Idea

Thesis Statement

Topic Sentences

Logical progression of ideas

Paragraphs and sentences

Structure of text

Abstract - summary of text

Introduction - thesis, methods

Main Body - major/minor supporting details

Conclusion - findings based on contents of text

Bibliography – sources



Revision Provides a Service for Your Reader

If you are always satisfied to send out the first draft of your letter or report, you are not serving your reader well: you are asking a high payment in terms of your reader's time and attention as well as running the risk that the reader may misinterpret or be confused by what you have to say; you are also risking your reader's low opinion - careless, hasty, unrevised writing is always noticed.



Revision Requires a Shift in Your Perspective

To revise effectively, you must first distance yourself from your writing so that you can respond objectively: **you need to shift your perspective by assuming the role of the reader.** To accomplish this, put aside the paper for a while, ideally until the following morning – if this is not possible then grab a bite to eat or work on something else. Unless you divorce yourself from the paper, you will see only what you think is on the page instead of what is actually there. **And you will be unable to transport yourself from your role of writer to that of reader.**

Such objective distance may appear difficult to achieve; however, the following questions should help you to systematize the revision stage of your writing and help keep your reader in mind as you determine appropriate detail, language, tone, organization, and mechanical correctness.



Detail: Deciding What to Include

Who is my reader and what does my reader want or need to know to enable him or her to understand my message?

Does my text answer all the questions my reader has asked or questions he or she may have in mind?

What is my purpose in writing this letter/report?

Does my letter/report give all the information needed to accomplish this purpose?

What purpose does this communication serve for my reader?

Have I included **ONLY** the material essential to my reader's purpose and understanding? Or am I boring or distracting my reader with unessential and/or obvious information?

What do I want my reader to do when he or she finishes reading my letter or report?

Have I included all the information he or she will need to enable my reader to easily take this action or make this decision?

Language: Revising for Concision and Clarity

Have I used **ONLY** the essential words to get my message across to the reader?

Wordy: Sale of surplus tappers is one of our primary needs. (10)

Concise: We must sell our surplus tappers. (6)

Wordy: This manual of instructions was prepared to aid our dealers in being helpful to their customers. (16)

Concise: We prepared this instruction manual to help our dealers serve their customers. (12)

Wordy: It is the responsibility of our Production Department to see that it meets the requirements of our Sales Division. (19)

Concise: Our Production Department must meet our Sales Division's requirements. (9)



Have I used too many words to express simple, unimportant, or obvious ideas?

Wordy: The collision had the effect of a destructive force on the duplicator. (12)

Concise: The collision destroyed the duplicator. (5)

Wordy: We have enclosed a pamphlet which shows further details of construction on page four. (14)

Concise: Page four of the enclosed pamphlet shows further construction details. (10)

Wordy: Three days ago you asked us to investigate the problem of discomfort among your office workers. . . We have made our study. Too low humidity is apparently the main cause of your problem. Your building is steam-heated; therefore, your solution is to. . . (41)

Concise: Too low humidity is apparently the cause of your workers' discomfort. Since your building is steam-heated, your solution is to . . . (21)

Have I poured out ideas and facts too rapidly for the reader's comprehension?

Negative Example

Our deluxe models have chromium, rubber-insulated fixtures for durability, economy, and easy maintenance, and convenient controls to cut down on installation costs and necessary adjustments. They operate on AC or DC current and incorporate the latest principles of electronic controls which means flexibility in their use, better adjustment of the thermal units, less chance of error, and reduced labour costs per unit of production.

Have I used vague words instead of more vivid and convincing specific words?

Vague: contact

Specific: call, write, visit

Vague: slowly

Specific about as fast as you normally walk

Vague: soon

Specific: by March 15

Vague: This television set is high quality.

Specific: All components in this television set meet or exceed government specifications for use in manned satellites.



Have I keyed the language to my reader's understanding?

Excessive, Overwritten: The defendant is renowned as a person of intemperate habits. He is known to partake heavily of intoxicating beverages. Further, he cultivates the company of others of the distaff side, and wholly, regularly, and consistently refuses and abstains from earnest endeavours to gain remuneration.

Accessible, Direct: The defendant drinks, chases other women, and refuses to work.

Excessive, Overwritten: The choice of exogenous variables in relation to multi-collinearity is contingent upon the derivations of certain multiple correlation coefficients.

Accessible, Direct Supply determines demand.



Writing Problems

Content lacks cohesive structure

Content lacks clarity

Ideas expressed randomly in

- a) paragraphs
- b) sentences

Direct translation from mother tongue

Inappropriate use of 'anglicized' vocabulary

Punctuation erratic or missing

Spelling errors



Police education in Hungary is organised through vocational schools and the police academy. At the lower end of police education (non-commissioned officers' – *tiszthelyettes* – training), students receive information on victim support and victim protection; at the police academy, future officers also study victimology.

According to the Ministry of Home Affairs Decree No. 64/2015. (XII. 12.), Section 4 Subs (1), the National Police Headquarters (ORFK) provide methodological assistance to local police in their victim-related duties. ORFK Reg. No. 2/2013. (I. 31.) Point 26 orders adequate victim support and victim protection knowledge to be built in to police personnel training. Although the involvement of state victim support officials in the provision of the training is required by the above regulation, this only takes place when personal relations between those in charge are good. Otherwise, either the Fehér Gyűrű Association or police crime prevention professionals train the police officers. Since 2008, Fehér Gyűrű has been providing police training, through a cooperation agreement, which was renewed in 2016, thus reaffirming the cooperation and trust between these institutions.

Training is usually organised whenever new legislation enters into force, but those assigned with duties related to victim protection (i.e. crime prevention officers) undergo additional training as required. (200 words)



One significant group of specialists is the law enforcement authorities (police officers, lawyers, prosecutors and judges), who interact most often with the victims during the criminal proceedings. To promote the quality of law enforcement officers, the “... plan to strengthen human resource capacity in the development of judicial power and law enforcement authorities for 2015–2020” was developed in 2014 and adopted by the Latvian government in 2015. The plan includes a systemic approach for the further education of ‘law enforcement’ officers in all professional competencies. The training is provided, not only for police officers, public prosecutors and judges, but also for State Probation Service and Prison Administration staff. In the context of this plan, training is available for bailiffs, advocates and notaries, as well as forensic experts and representatives of other professions, who work in the area of criminal law. Within this training program, significant importance is given on how to approach and communicate with victims, while taking account of their needs. The training also promotes mediation in criminal proceedings, facilitating the compensation of harm inflicted by a criminal offence, and the development of restorative justice methods. The training process is provided through interactive adult education methods, with attention focused on practical skills. (204 words)

Under a Ministry of the Interior Law, Ministry officials, as well as the police, are required to have appropriate professional qualifications to implement their tasks and activities. The same law requires them to maintain and regularly improve their professional training and qualifications. However, the legislation does not prescribe compulsory training for police officers on how to work with children and victims of crime, or on issues related to victims' rights.

In accordance with the Law on Assistance and Financial Compensation of Victims of Crime, the National Council for Assistance and Financial Compensation for Victims of Crime organizes and conducts training of different professional groups that assist victims of crime. However, neither the law nor the rules for its application specify how the training shall be funded, which organizations will provide the training, when or how often the training will take place and which groups of professionals should be trained.

It can be concluded that while Article 25 of the Directive has been formally adopted, it is unlikely to have any impact on reality.

It was underlined that the training provided is very limited, exists only within certain projects, and is mainly implemented by NGOs. The training itself is fragmented and is not part of a more sophisticated and comprehensive skills development program. (212 words)

At a national level, the Federation interacts least with lawyers. However, on a local level, there are many partnerships with victim support associations, which raise awareness and train lawyers in victim support. Some lawyers register for France Victimes' training, making it easier to develop partnerships and bond with victim support associations.

While France Victimes has developed many training opportunities, individual member associations are often too busy to be able to send jurists or relevant staff members to Paris to be trained. As all staff need to be trained, update their legal knowledge and exchange good practices, some associations try to organise internal training if staff cannot attend the Federation's training sessions.

At present, there seems to be a lack of university courses and training related to victims' rights. Law students are poorly informed of these issues, even when universities offer degrees in victimology. (143 words)



And finally ...

Define the writer/reader contract

Maintain Thesis, Audience, Purpose orientation throughout text

Ensure the text is cohesive, coherent, concise and clear



Thank you for your attention.

Any questions?

<https://owl.purdue.edu/owl>