



Action*Words*

**Keeping your reader engaged
in a social media world**

CDN Conference
7 March 2019

Outline

1. Audience – must be front of mind
2. Plain English – what it really is
3. The pillars of business writing
4. Readability
5. Sentences
6. Headlines

Connecting with your audience

To connect with your audience and deliver a message effectively and convincingly:

1. Get to know your audience
2. Capture the audience's attention (go straight to the point and be specific)
3. Use 'you'-focused language
4. Tell them how they will benefit
5. Establish a connection.

Plain English

In business today, plain English is writing your audience can easily understand the first time they read it.

- ✓ Clear
- ✓ Concise
- ✓ Well-organised.

With plain English, your readers find what they need easily, and they understand it immediately

Techniques to help you achieve your goal:

- Keep the reader in mind
- Make sentences short
- Use “You” and other pronouns
- Choose common, everyday words.

Don't make them work

- If you want to get a message across, you must make it clear.
- You must get to the point quickly.
- Don't give your readers hard work – if they have to work at your sentences to understand your meaning, you'll lose them.

Using plain English

- Avoid overused phrases:

Take this offline

At this point in time

Moving forward

It is what it is

At the end of the day

Bang for your buck

Think outside the box

Back to the drawing board

I don't have the bandwidth

You just have to find your passion



Attention!

1. Attention spans are at their lowest ever
2. According to a study by Microsoft, the average person now has an attention span of eight seconds. (In 2000 it was 12 seconds)
3. What's this mean for our writing at work?

People everywhere are time-poor and over-busy

- It is not just your school
- Everywhere people are multitasking
- Everywhere people are overstretched, overstressed, over committed.



The 4 pillars of non-fiction writing

The 4 pillars of non-fiction writing

CLARITY

SIMPLICITY

BREVITY

HUMANITY

Pillar 1
CLARITY

Clarity

- If it isn't clear you might as well not write it; you might as well stay in bed
- Clarity is the goal in writing; the main prize
- It's surprisingly hard to achieve because so many sentences as they're first written, tend to come out just a little wrong

Pillar 2
SIMPLICITY

Simplicity

- Clutter:
 - the crippling disease in writing today
 - it's the main enemy
- We're a society drowning in:
 - unnecessary words
 - meaningless jargon
 - pompous frills
- With so much verbal bloatage, you can hardly hear a simple, plain sentence anymore

Simplicity

- We are not writing for the sake of writing
- We are writing to communicate – to get our message across and to get our recipients to either agree with us, do something or register, or whatever.
- One of the critical requirements for communicating, is to use words that you are sure the other person understands

Choosing words carefully

- Your wonderful vocab does not impress
- Simple words are better –

Construct

Peruse

Regarding

Converse

Observe

Remunerate



Simplicity

- All writing is visual – it catches the eye, before it has a chance to catch the brain.

Simplicity

- All writing is visual – it catches the eye, before it catches the brain.
- THE REASON WE DO NOT USE ALL CAPS IS THAT THEY ARE MORE DIFFICULT TO READ
- The reason we do not use all caps is that they are more difficult to read
- Compare: ALL CAPS
all caps

Simplicity

- Use white space
- Take advantage of dot points
- Choose your font carefully
- **Century Gothic (sans serif)**
- **Georgia (serif)**



Pillar 3
BREVITY

Keep it brief

- Saying things in the most economical way, not giving the reader anything she or he doesn't need.
- Writing is like a good watch. It should function smoothly and have no extra parts to get in the way.
- Short is better than long.



Brevity

- **Short words** are better than long words.
 - Don't use numerous when you can use many.
 - Don't use assistance when you can use help.
- **Short sentences** are better than long sentences.
- **Short paragraphs** are better than long paragraphs.



Brevity makes things clearer

Reverse backward

Repeat again

Actual fact

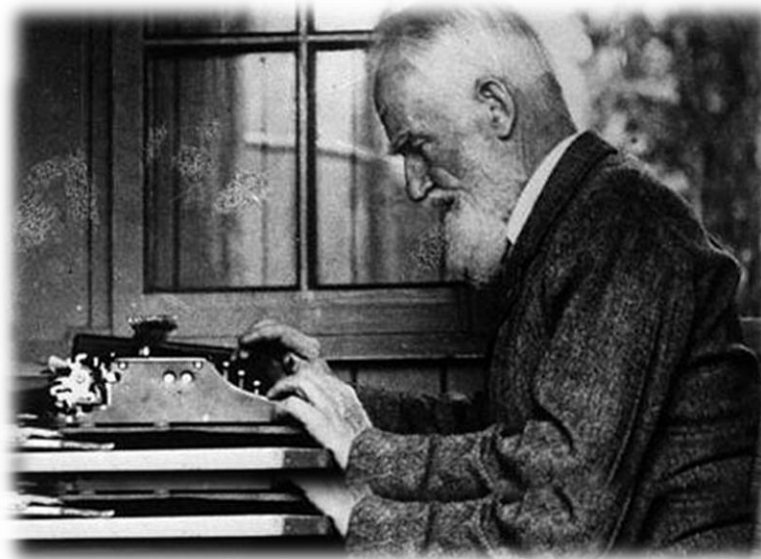
Progress forward

Around in circles

But writing succinctly with brevity and clarity takes time and effort

“Sorry about the length of this letter – I didn’t have enough time to write a shorter one.”

George Bernard Shaw



Pillar 4
HUMANITY

Humanity

- Be natural... be yourself
- Never say anything in writing that you wouldn't comfortably say in conversation
- When they sit down to write, most people try to commit an act of literature
- Usually, the 'person' who emerges on paper is much stiffer than the person who sat down to write

Humanity

- If your writing is stiff and pompous that's how you'll be perceived
- If you are writing on behalf of your organisation, that's how your organisation will be perceived
- When a piece of writing is your only chance to introduce yourself to someone, don't squander your best asset which is yourself
- However anxious you may be to get it right... remember your humanity

Readability

Lets assess the handout

Flesch Kincaid

(since 1948)

- This a US scoring system available in Word
- It's not the final nor only answer for assessing your writing
- It is an assessment to consider
- It can be a handy guide

Flesch Kincaid scores

	Version 1	Version 2
Flesch Reading ease	72.6	49.8
Grade level	6.9	14.5
Words per sentence	15.5	33.2
Passive	0	0

Flesch Kincaid – where to turn it on

In Word, go to:

1. File
2. Options
3. Advanced
4. Proofing
5. Show readability statistics

Scores normally appear after you do a “Spelling & Grammar” check

Sentences

Two golden rules for writing sentences at work

- Golden rule 1:
 - Express one, and only one, idea in each sentence.

- Golden rule 2:
 - Make sure you are **clear** about the idea you are expressing

FOUR techniques for improving your sentences

FOUR techniques for improving your sentences

- 1. Write shorter sentences**

Sentence length

No. of Words	Level of Comprehension
8 or less	Very easy
9 – 11	Easy
12 – 14	Fairly easy
15 – 17	Standard
18 – 21	Fairly difficult
22 – 25	Difficult
26 – 30	Very difficult
Beyond 30	Don't go there!

FOUR techniques for improving your sentences

2. Vary sentence length

Vary the length of your sentences

Your writing is immediately more interesting if the length of your sentences vary.

Include a very short sentence if possible.

It is acceptable today to shorten sentences by using sentence fragments - partial sentences.

“All the crusading doesn't reassure the public. Just the opposite.”

Vary sentence length

- Consider extra short sentences and/or fragments to begin or end paragraphs
- And you can string two or three short sentences together to create cadence

“The report lists all options. The choice is yours. In a downturn, anything is possible.”

FOUR techniques improving your sentences

3. Use the dash

Use the dash

- Stronger, more dynamic, more exciting than a comma.
- It's a good writing tool if you don't overuse it.
- They give your sentences a quick stop-and-go.

“New York is a city ripe with extremes – of wealth and poverty, of creative energy and rage.”

FOUR techniques for improving your sentences

4. Speak to them

Speak to them

- Address your readers directly to make your message personal and compelling.

“As a mother who wants the very best for her child, you will understand the need for discipline in the classroom.”

Final thought on sentences

- A sentence is a fragile entity
- It can only do so much
- Don't pile it up with tangled thoughts
- Ensure that each sentence says what you want it to say, and your reader will thank you

Headlines

Six effective headline types

- Over the years, writers have found that several headline formulas almost always work well

(Your turn soon!)

1. Ask a question

“Are you often worried about completing board papers on time?”

- A question headline gets readers to answer in their minds
- You automatically get the prospect involved
- People will read further just to find out the answer
- Consider making it thought-provoking

2. Start with “How To”

“How to accurately measure your performance at work.”

- “How to” headlines work like magic
- People love information that shows them how to do something valuable
- Works for reports or letters that provide helpful information
- Takes the perceived work away from the reader

3. Provide a testimonial

“Linking up with the Cancer Council was a great move for us”

Mike Georges, BHP

- Recommendations can go a long way to convince others
- Identify the speaker as much as possible

4. Give important news

“Announcing: top English teacher from Oxford arrives at St Bede’s”

- Can work well for big changes in your organisation

5. Put a deadline in your headline

“Feasibility report to be completed by 30 September.”

- Great for focusing the mind and getting attention
- Everyone is busy and tends to put off action

6. Put a benefit in your headline

“Receive our latest white paper when you attend upcoming AGM.”

- Places your number one selling point up front
- It stands the best chance of selecting the right audience
- If they read nothing else, they have at least seen the best selling point you have to offer

Some great headline words

- You
- Free
- New
- Discover
- Announcing
- Last Chance

Thank you

At Action Words:

- ✓ *we can write for you,*
or
- ✓ *we can train your people to be better writers.*

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