

Questions and Answers Regarding Writing for Organizations

In what way is writing for organizations unique?

Subject matter and formats

- Writers must take on a variety of subjects.
- They must produce texts in many formats, from memos, reports, and summaries to letters, e-mails, and webpages.

Purposes

- Organizational writing proposes, informs, reports, persuades, summarizes, researches, analyzes, evaluates, publicizes, or announces information.

Audiences

- Organizational writing is directed at individuals, groups, other institutions, and to the general public.

Styles

- Depending on context, organizational writing is formal or informal, and direct or indirect.
- Informal texts are shorter in size than formal texts but may not differ in style.
- Formal writing tackles more complex problems, analyzes them in greater depth, and presents thorough evidence to support its recommendations.
- A direct writing style gets to the point early on.
- An indirect writing style purposely delays key information.

Circumstances

- Organizational writing often takes place in an institutional setting.
- It is generally subject to deadline pressure.
- It is usually written by a single writer, although several people may take part in writing and editing a complex report.

What writing style should you practice for organizations? General rules:

- **Be brief.** Don't waste a reader's time. Allow the reader to assimilate ideas and information in small doses. Write simply, clearly, and concisely.
- **Be precise.** Use words for their exact meaning.
- **Be clear.** Leave no doubt or confusion in the reader's mind. Transmit information, ideas, and feelings to a reader clearly and without overstatement.

- **Be relatable.** Focus on specifics rather than generalities. Outline ideas that a reader can relate to.
- **Be modest.** Write words, facts, and ideas that speak for themselves rather than try to impress a reader.
- **Be efficient.** Use a minimum number of words to make your point.
- **Be aware.** Focus on your reader's needs.

What writing style should you practice for organizations?

Sentences

Dos:

- Use simple words that the reader can relate to.
- Place important ideas at the beginning of sentences.
- Convey important points in short, emphatic sentences.
- Follow each point with supporting information.
- Use the active voice in order to identify the performer of an action.
- Use the passive voice selectively.
- Use pronoun subjects (e.g. he, she, they) only when who they refer to is clear.
- Vary sentence type and length to give pace to writing.
- Break down complex and compound sentences into simple sentences.
- Build sentences around nouns and verbs to increase understanding.
- Adopt a "you" view focused on the reader.

Do nots:

- Avoid phrases that draw attention to your writing rather than to its information.
- Do not use more words than are necessary: competing words undermine important ideas.
- Do not convert verbs to nouns. Verbs are more descriptive.
- Avoid dangling and misplaced modifiers. Modifiers must be close to words they describe or limit.
- Eliminate jargon or technical language used in specialized fields.
- Avoid *bureaucratese*, imprecise phrasing that makes words sound more important than they are.
- Don't use *opening fillers*, expressions such as "there is" or "it is" that create an indirect subject.
- Avoid *colloquial expressions*, everyday phrases from oral conversation.
- Do not write *clichés* or overused phrases.
- Avoid inverted sentences in order to provide information to readers quickly and efficiently.
- Avoid passive verb constructions as they create ambiguity.
- Avoid piling up adjectives and adverbs as they slow the reading.
- Avoid abstract or vague language.

Paragraphs

Dos:

- Structure your paragraphs carefully to discuss only one topic.
- Reveal the primary idea in a topic sentence that usually, but not always, appears first.
- Link the primary idea with other sentences using transitional expressions that support or illustrate that idea.
- Compose paragraphs of three types of sentences: 1) topic sentence, 2) supporting sentences, and 3) limiting sentences that suggest contrasting thought.

Do nots:

- Avoid writing single sentence paragraphs.

Entire texts**Dos:**

- Focus on the receiver of the text, not on the sender.
- Generally, include an introduction, a main body, and a conclusion.
- Open by outlining the main idea.
- Highlight important items or sections by setting them off with letters, numerals, bullets, headings, and capitals, and boldfaced, underscored, or italicized script.
- Provide the reader information that explains the significance of charts and graphics.
- Develop parallelism; match nouns with nouns, verbs with verbs, phrases with phrases, clauses with clauses, headings with headings.
- Write with unity! When you introduce new information, link it adequately to other parts of the text.
- Be sure that the language of the text respects your reader.

Don'ts:

- Avoid redundancy; don't repeat yourself unnecessarily.