

PR News Writing Workshop

All you need to know about story telling,
business writing and editing by Jeff Opperman



Ineffective vs. Effective Writing

Ineffective Writing

- ▶ Unclear or irrelevant
- ▶ Leaves a lot unanswered
- ▶ Hard to understand – too many acronyms or too much jargon
- ▶ Bland or boring
- ▶ Doesn't connect – no line to strategy or goals
- ▶ Doesn't connect – not even to the reason for the written communication
- ▶ Fails to engage and inspire

Effective Writing

- ▶ Has a goal and meets it
- ▶ Tailored to audience
- ▶ Easy to understand
- ▶ Avoids stuffiness
- ▶ Tells a story
- ▶ Provides a clear understanding of subject
- ▶ Answers anticipated questions
- ▶ Connects the dots to broader initiative, overall strategy, goals and purpose of communication
- ▶ Drives high levels of engagement

Effective Writing

- ▶ Answers anticipated questions. If the reader wants to know:
 - “What?” provide details
 - “How?” discuss process
 - “Why?” provide history
 - Use “who, when, where” to keep answers short and factual
- ▶ To be a good writer you also have to be a good reader/listener
 - Radio – news, sports, commercials
 - Television – continuing dramas, soap operas, news
 - Mass Market Publications – *People Magazine, US Weekly, Men’s Health, Cosmopolitan,*
 - Newspapers – *New York Post* and *Daily News* headlines
 - Online –Blogs, Twitter

What is the result of effective writing?

- ▶ The writer gets what he or she wants:
 - Attention
 - Agreement
 - Support
 - Decision
 - Action
 - Information
 - Emotional Reaction
 - Contributions
 - Appointments
 - Sales



**Write like a
Professional**

#PowerofPR

Before you write ask:

- ▶ Who is your communication to?
- ▶ What is your communication goal?
- ▶ What is the reader's relationship to the topic?
- ▶ What is the reader's primary interest in the topic?
- ▶ How will the reader benefit from the topic?
- ▶ What attitudes, perceptions, risks or fears might the reader have about the topic?
- ▶ What questions will the reader ask?
- ▶ What unique facts must the reader know?

Inverted Pyramid Writing

Information reader **MUST** have for communication to be successful.
(Who, What, When, Where, How)

Additional information, helpful – but not critical.

Information that would be nice if they had it.

Place critical information at the beginning.

After first paragraph, a reader can stop reading at any time.

Your Turn: Say it in one sentence

- ▶ Using the inverted pyramid style, write the first sentence of a press release using the most important facts:
 - Berkshire Moving Company CEO Ben Acme
 - Three more products in the pipeline for 2016–2017 release
 - Joint venture between Berkshire Moving Company and XYZ Analytics
 - New App allows customers to monitor location and condition of possessions
 - Berkshire is the premier moving company in the U.S. with \$10 billion in sales and 1,200 locations
 - App will sell for \$4.99
 - App will be on the market in six months

Not What You Say but How You Say it

- ▶ State your main point or “ask” up front.
- ▶ Answer the who, what, when and where.
- ▶ Use simple language – “Explain it to me like I’m a three year old.”
- ▶ Avoid clichés and jargon.
- ▶ Avoid regional references, slang and idioms.
- ▶ Remember non-verbal communication doesn’t exist in writing.
- ▶ Listen to your message – if your words sound strange to your ear, they’ll sound strange inside the reader’s head.



Less is more

Write First and Edit Later

- ▶ Write down everything and then:
 - Read it out loud – if you can't finish a sentence without taking a breath, edit
 - Edit little to big – words, sentences, paragraphs, pages
 - Axe big chunks – slides, charts graphs
 - Try to keep paragraphs to 1–2 sentences
 - Replace dense copy with tables or bullets
 - Avoid acronyms and corporate speak
 - Read out loud and backwards for typos
 - Use active verbs, avoid adjectives

The Wrong Way

To make your message easier to “handle,” be sure to edit what you write.

You need to begin by placing information in the order of importance by applying the inverted pyramid model. When possible, make use of tables, bullet lists or graphs to present your information so that it is concise and clear.

Your writing should not be done using passive voice but rather active voice; specifically, the use of active verbs should be used. You should try to avoid using what many refer to as “corporate speak,” which is general, vague and overused corporate phrases and words.

When you are editing, make sure you are using terminology that is appropriate for your audiences. Don’t assume people understand acronyms; be sure to spell them out the first time you use them in your message (e.g., DR (Disaster Recovery)).

Once you’re done writing, go through what you wrote and take out what is unnecessary to get your message across. This is the time to take out slides, pages, paragraphs, sentences and words that don’t add to your message and end up making your message more difficult to handle. Read your copy out loud, and do a final edit.

Finally, polish for readability; for example, make sure you’re using the best word choice and correct grammar. The use of bold, italics, colors, etc. can help emphasis or group information.

The Right Way

- **To make your message easier to “handle,” be sure to edit what you write.**
- Order information using the inverted pyramid.
- Use tables, bullet lists or graphs.
- Use active verbs.
- Avoid “corporate–speak.”
- Use appropriate terminology, spell out acronyms.
- Remove the unnecessary pages, paragraphs, sentences and words.
- Read it out loud.
- Revise.
- Polish. (word choice, grammar, font)

Active Verbs = Short, Clear

- ▶ **Passive:** The ball was hit by the boy
 - **Active:** The boy hit the ball
- ▶ **Passive:** A meeting was held on Tuesday at...
 - **Active:** We held a meeting Tuesday
- ▶ **Passive:** The note was reviewed by Angela
 - **Active:** Angela reviewed the note
- ▶ **Passive:** Extensive training on the new software was required to be attended by our maintenance staff
 - **Active:** Our staff attended extensive training on the new software

Edit for Clarity

People are trained to scan communications these days – whether they are business communications or public mass media – at a fast pace.

Think of FOX news style – short bursts of information, urgent tone, not too in-depth

I got up, walked over to the window and looked out. I could tell from the absence of light in the sky that it was deep into the evening. The weather was inclement and rain and wind howled.



It was a stormy night

Please find attached to this email the report that you asked me to send regarding our government research results.



Attached is the government research report.

Senator Edward Kennedy

- ▶ “My brother need not be idealized, or enlarged in death beyond what he was in life; to be remembered as a good and decent man, who saw wrong and tried to right it, saw suffering and tried to heal it, saw war and tried to stop it.”

- ▶ June 8, 1968
- ▶ St. Patrick’s Cathedral, New York
- ▶ Funeral of Senator Robert F. Kennedy

For further questions:

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