

Principles of effective writing

Facts



How accurate?

Ideas



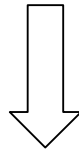
How meaningful?

An effective document...

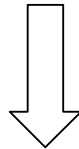
- **has one governing idea**
- **addresses a specific person or group**
- **makes a point, then supports it with evidence**
- **may support the governing idea with a limited number of other ideas**
- **is as easy to read as possible**

Constructing an effective document

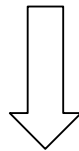
1. Creating a message



2. Organising your ideas



3. Writing the first draft



4. Editing for greater clarity

Creating a message

**1. Defining
your purpose**

**2. Analysing
your readership**

**One governing idea
(the main message)**

**3. Writing a
message sentence**

**4. Checking your
message**

Defining your purpose

‘What do you want your document to do?’

(NOT ‘What is your document about?’)

1. What do you want to achieve?

- I want to correct an inequality in the provision of services
- I want to instruct somebody
- I want to put forward some ideas
- I want the funding body to release some funds
- I want to gain access to a community leader

2. What do you want the reader to do?

- act differently
- allocate resources
- consider some ideas
- join the team
- contribute to a project
- change their minds
- put something right
- release funds
- lobby the government
- agree with me

3. What do you want the document to do?

Most documents **explain** or **advocate** something.

	<u>Explain</u>	<u>Advocate</u>
➤ notify	➤ update	➤ recommend
➤ announce	➤ confirm	➤ justify
➤ clarify	➤ invite	➤ argue
➤ compare	➤ outline	➤ propose
➤ highlight	➤ summarise	➤ suggest
➤ identify	➤ categorise	

4. The function statement

'I want this document to (purpose sentence) so that (reader action).'

Analysing your readership

Primary: the reader who *must* read the document

Secondary: the reader who will not read the whole document but may need to use part of it or know it exists

Tertiary: the reader who may use the document in some unforeseen way in the future

You need to satisfy all of these audiences but you must design the document for the **primary readership** only.

Managing the primary reader's expectations:

- Type of document?
- Nature of outcome?
- Level of detail?
- Previous related decisions?
- Key issues?
- Wider strategic objectives?

Writing a message sentence

Constructing an effective message involves:

- Constructing the message
- Checking and improving the message

1. Constructing the message

An effective message should:

- express your purpose
- make a single point
- be a sentence
- contain about 15-20 words
- be focussed on action
- be interesting to the reader
- be written in familiar terms
- provide new information
- provoke a question in the reader's mind

2. Checking the message

Look at your message and ask:

- Is this what you would say to the primary readers, face to face?
- Would it make sense to them, on its own?
- Is it appropriate?
- Would they be interested?

Checking your message

1. Situation

The situation statement should be:

- **self-sufficient** (no previous statement is necessary to make its meaning clear)
- **uncontroversial** (the reader can understand and agree with it automatically)

2. Problem

The problem may be:

- presented (what you expected vs what happened)
- constructed (what is vs what could be)

3. Question

The problem triggers a question:

Presented problem	Question
Something has gone wrong	What has gone wrong? How can we put it right? How to proceed now?
A discrepancy between what you expected and what happened	What is the discrepancy? What caused it? How do we adjust future plans?

Constructed problem	Question
I want to do something better	How could you do it better? What's the best way of doing it?
I want to improve a process or system	How do we improve it? How could we improve it?

4. Response

The same as your main message

Example of an SPQR story:

Situation: Our service is rapidly expanding

Problem: Our premises are small and not ideally located

Question: Where should we relocate?

Response: We should locate to Entebbe