



WRITING FOR IMPACT: TIPS FOR IMPROVING WRITING SKILLS

Good writing is clear thinking made visible. ~Bierce

ATTACHMENT #3

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Audience

- If your goal is to get a message to the reader, then your knowledge of the reader is a key to your success. Clearly identify your audience: age, gender, what they know about the subject, what they don't know about the subject, etc.
- Is the reader familiar with Cooperative Extension?
- Is the reader interested in the topic?
- What does the reader want to know?
- Audience Similarities:
 - Are interested in results
 - Want brief, understandable information
 - Competition for their attention
 - Are not specialists or scientists
 - Have some control over programs
- Keep your audience in mind as you write.

Words

- Less is more: use the right word, not the most; simple familiar words are best; avoid jargon and unfamiliar words.
- Words are your tools – use the appropriate tool for the task.
- Words don't think for you. They only convey your thoughts.
- If the idea is not clear in your mind, the words won't clear it up.
- When you have trouble putting something into words, stop trying to write and start trying to think.
- **Use** the short word: is – **not** exists
- **Use** the simple word: ate – **not** consumed
- **Use** the personal word: you – **not** one
- **Use** the specific word: 110°F – **not** quite hot
- **Use** the colorful word: big as a basketball – **not** very large
- **Use** the active word: It bit me – **not** I was bitten by it
- **Use** the familiar word: beekeeping – **not** apiculture

Numbers

- Make statistics easy to understand. Say "one out of eight" instead of 12 ½ percent. Use analogies such as, "During the five minutes it takes for you to read this story, 10 people will be diagnosed with cancer." Too many statistics can overwhelm the reader.

- In text, spell out numbers below 10 and use figures i.e., 18, to express numbers of 10 or more.
- In groups of two or more numbers, treat the sentence as a unit:
 - He had two suits.
 - He had 100 ties.
 - He had 100 ties, 12 shirts, and 2 suits.
 - One or two more won't matter.
- Spell out numbers at the beginning of a sentence: Fifty-three people attended. Exceptions are symbols such as, 4-H.

Simplify

- Use the short word
- Use short sentences, the more words the harder it is to follow.
- Be as brief as possible
- Eliminate excess evidence and unnecessary examples. Usually one fact or example will support your point.
- Edit, then edit, then edit again. Be ruthless with your copy.
- Start well. The first one or two sentences capture the reader's attention.
- Be conversational. Convey your message with common everyday words. Use contractions. We use them when speaking.
- Use personal words. "I", "you" and "we" involve the readers.

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