

Communication is a vital leadership skill. Written communications play an important role in business and throughout their careers, managers will have to produce reports, proposals, papers to gain approval for routine planning, new initiatives, or major change. Listed below are some guidelines to help you get the response you want from busy readers.

## PLANNING

### Define your objective

What do you want the reader to do? Is it for information, discussion or decision? Approve a project, an acquisition, or agree an expansion strategy?

### Understand your audience

- o Reader context – Who are they, what matters to them, what do they know, what else are they looking at?
- o Reader questions – What is this for, why should I care, what am I being asked to do, what do I need to know, what's the benefit?
- o Reader response – How will they respond -agree, disagree, not understand, ignore?

Clarity of writing usually follows clarity of thought.

– The Economist Style Guide

## EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

**Start with your executive summary** – Distil your message into (ideally) one page of max 6-10 points.

For an investment in a business expansion your proposal might include:

Products - Economics – Country Assessment - Strategic Fit – Market Assessment – HSE – Finance – Competition – Benefits

**End (or even start) with a call to action** – Leaving no doubt as to what you expect the reader to do.

Make it clear what you want the reader to do.

## WRITING

### Get the right structure

Make sure a logical flow leads the reader to the objective e.g.

- o Problem/opportunity
- o Solution/idea being proposed
- o Risks/challenges to overcome
- o Benefits and future success
- o Close and call to action

Let the narrative flow through the headlines so even if readers skim over the main text, they still get the message.

A picture paints a 1,000 words -use graphics and signposting where possible.

### Use the right language and tone of voice

Clarity and brevity are vital; elegant, flowing prose is not.

Paraphrasing George Orwell's rules for good English:

- o Short words rather than long ones –“Use new process tool”, not “Utilise innovative technique for manufacturing”
- o Active voice rather than passive –“The first test will provide critical data”, not “Critical data will be provided as a result of carrying out the first test”
- o If you can cut a word out, always cut
- o Keep sentences short
- o Avoid foreign words, jargon or acronyms unless you know they are familiar to the reader (so CAPEX, but probably not ROACE or SCADA). As a rule, use the full phrase at first

## EDITING

### Be ready to spend as much time editing as you do writing

The final version may look nothing like your first draft.

- o Does every sentence help the reader to a decision? Cut any that do not
- o Do any points leave the reader confused, uncertain or asking for more information? If so, clarify
- o Do any sections invite unnecessary challenge or disagreement? Strengthen your case
- o Does the narrative flow logically and support the key message? Re-order and cut if not

Corporate branding: ensure document is “on-brand” and follows the company style guide.

## PROOF-READING

### Get someone else to proofread if you can

If not, try to wait a few hours after editing before proofreading.

Basic errors look sloppy and give a bad impression; at worst, they confuse the reader and damage your arguments. Look out for:

- o Typo's –spelling & grammar mistakes, numbers that don't add up
- o Layout –word, line and paragraph breaks
- o Fonts & typefaces –consistent sizes, bold, italics
- o Images & graphics –captions, references

**FINAL TIP:** Consider the Flesch-Kincaid Reading Ease Test, and aim for a score of well over 50 -visit [www.readability-score.com](http://www.readability-score.com).

## COURSES

- High Performance Leadership
- Fast Track to Leadership
- Project Management
- Stakeholder Management
- Procurement and Supply Chain Management
- 3 Day MBA in Energy in Transition
- Project Governance
- Corporate Social Responsibility

## OTHER WBC GUIDES

- The Business Case
- Portfolio Management
- Industry specific guides

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