

**Strategic
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Strategic Writing Tools

1. What Readers Want

The main thing the reader wants is your message — usually in as few words as possible. Here are a few other things that readers prefer:

- *Ease of use.* Give the reader content that is easy to navigate and understand.
- *Control.* Don't make the reader fight to gain control of your content. Make everything easy and accessible.
- *Non-interference.* Readers want convenient, fast, and pain free. The solution: keep things simple.
- *Results.* Determine before writing whether you intend to inform, instruct, inspire, or entertain. Then keep to your purpose.
- *Good examples.* Crisp, clear examples plant your message (and a sense of your expertise) firmly in the reader's mind.

2. What Readers Don't Want

- *You.* The reader does not want to know about you. In most cases, the reader could care less about you personally.
- *Your writing style.* You and your writing style influence the reader, but they are secondary. Very secondary. Focus on your message, not on how you are trying to say it.
- *Your company.* The reader doesn't want to know how fabulous you and your team are. The reader wants features, benefits, and solutions that will help them.
- *Your success.* The reader doesn't want a list of your strengths or an explanation of how successful you have been. Readers want you to demonstrate those things in terms of how you can help them be more successful.

3. Limitations of Readers

As you write keep in mind the following limitations of most readers and be creative about how to overcome them:

- *Attention span.* Provide frequent pauses (paragraph breaks), reminders (connecting ideas), or boosts (new or exciting facts).
- *Quantity.* Serve small bites and allow time to chew.
- *Sequence.* Present ideas in logical sequence.
- *Connections.* Introduce the big picture and then explain how parts fit into it. Don't allow parts to exist by themselves without a clear connection to the whole.
- *Visualization.* Provide crystal clear examples. Draw a picture with words.
- *Subjectivity.* Bend your writing to the reader's point of view, or persuade the reader to look through your lens. Be clear about which tactic you are using.

4. Limitations of Writers

Also keep in mind your own limitations as a writer:

- *Haste.* Most people don't allow sufficient time for working out their ideas before writing. They skip planning and jump into writing. They think they are accomplishing something by starting to write, not realizing that they have avoided the planning stage.
- *Foggy concept.* A good idea may not be a core idea. A vague notion is not a precise message. If you are not sure, it means that it's not yet time to start writing.
- *Poor strategy.* Even if you know your core message, delivering it gets sloppy if you don't have a clear strategy behind it—which often results in a lot of rewriting.

- *Editing while writing.* Another symptom of poor planning is that you keep fiddling with sentence structure as you write, digging for that mysterious core message. Remember, editing can never replace a lack of good planning.
- *Writer's block.* It doesn't really exist. What exists is 'idea block' or 'planning block'. Once you grab your core message and see how it can impact the reader, the words will come.

5. Target Your Topic

For your topic to come alive and achieve impact, it needs to convey a strong, clear message. To do this, it needs to be infused with your central idea, your purpose for delivering it, and your intended result.

Topic: What are you saying?

Purpose: Why are you saying it?

Result: Specifically, how do you want to impact the reader?

If you clearly understand all of these elements as reflections of your core message before you write, you will hit the target every time.

6. Sketch a Little

Sketching grants you freedom, flexibility, and freshness. It saves reorganization and rewriting.

Leonardo da Vinci did multiple studies, sketches, and under-paintings before he committed to final designs, compositions, and perspectives.

Dostoevsky tried different and points of view before *Crime and Punishment* became the voice of a roving narrator who takes us into each character's mind.

Great architects experiment with multiple drawings before they finalize a blueprint.

7. Write for One Reader

“Normal” writing is writer-centric and audience-vague. Strategic writing is message-centric and audience-specific. The difference is huge.

- Explaining your message to one ideal reader forces you to know what your message really is.
- Engaging just one customer in your mind forces you to understand why you want to achieve a certain result.
- Committing yourself to one reader forces you to be clear about how your solution will work.

8. Get to Your Core Message

Before each section, paragraph, and sentence, ask yourself (better yet, jot down in the margin so you don't forget):

- What central point do I want to convey?
- What is the core idea at the center of all others?
- What do I most want the reader to remember and take away?

Confidence. The more you understand and feel confident about your core message, the stronger and more succinct your writing will be.

Care. Treat each paragraph with care. Be conscious of why you put it together, why you choose to present its information in a certain order, and what effect you want it to achieve with the reader. Make every word count.

Communication. The truth is that business writing and business communication often lack serious planning and organization. As a result, they are vague and weak instead of precise and powerful.

9. Use the AIDA Method

AIDA came from guerilla marketing and is still useful for almost any

size of writing project. Strategy is at the essence of this simple 4-step (think 4-paragraph or 4-section) approach to building your message.

AIDA:

- **A**—Attention. Grab the reader's attention with a compelling statement, fact, question, or position.
- **I**—Interest. Create interest by digging deeper into and expanding your main point, theme, or problem.
- **D**—Desire/Decision. Arouse desire about your solution. Evoke enough interest to promote or prompt a decision.
- **A**—Action. Give the reader a clear way to take action: to contact you, decide, or buy.

This 4-part method can be used to great effect with a memo, a business letter, or an executive summary. It can also serve as the structure and strategy of a proposal, a report, or a web site.

Get Strategic

- ▶ Don't just know your audience. Target their core values.
- ▶ Don't just write content. Engineer and build it strategically.
- ▶ Don't just send a message. Deliver it with maximum impact.

StrategicBusinessWriters.com

We help customers communicate the core message about their products and services in a way that resonates with both the business needs and human values of their customers.

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