

10 Principles for Clearer Communication -- at a glance

Follow these principles to ensure your document will be clear, easy to read, and to the point.

Principle 1: Know your audience

Identify your reader(s), be aware of what they want and need to know, and then determine the most effective way(s) to communicate your message.

Principle 2: Develop an outline

Creating an outline before you write will make it easier to organize your thoughts. Making any kind of outline will help your writing process.

Principle 3: Be consistent

Consistency within a document and among documents of the same type help both the reader and the writer. The reader can easily identify documents and know in advance how they are laid out. The writer's job is easier because he or she knows what format to follow.

Principle 4: Use headings

Headings can be words, phrases, or sentences. To be effective, they should be concise and consistent throughout the document.

Principle 5: Write deductively -- State the main point first

Deductive writing is easy for the reader to follow and understand. It is the most effective structure for communicating technical or complex information.

Principle 6: Write effective paragraphs

Effective paragraphs have four characteristics: topic sentences, unity, coherence, and conciseness.

Principle 7: Write concise sentences

Use active voice and parallel structure. Limit each sentence to one main idea and 20-25 words. Use shorter words and fewer prepositions.

Principle 8: Avoid jargon & limit acronyms

Use jargon and acronyms ONLY when they will help the reader.

Principle 9: Know when to stop

Readers' time and interest in your subject vary. Keep your audience(s) in mind and limit your writing accordingly.

Principle 10: Review your draft

Use a cold reader or set the draft aside for a day or two and be your own cold reader. Be alert to your typical errors.