

Writing Tip: Put what you want to get done in paragraph one

Adapted from *Writing to Get Things Done*® seminar

Productivity Tip

To help your readers get things done, give them your "bottom line" up front. This writing tip is common sense, but not common practice.



Stan Berry

Common Sense

It's common sense if you want to be more productive. You get things done by being up front and clear with the reader. Put your most important idea in the opening paragraph, and then make everything that follows support it.

It's common sense if you want to be read. The first questions readers ask of any document are, "How does this document affect me? Do I have to do anything?" When readers can't find these answers quickly or clearly, they stop reading. They put it down in their "to read later" file with good intentions.

Not Common Practice

This writing tip is not common practice - which is unfortunate for readers, writers and the organizations in which they work. Look at most of the emails and other documents that you read (and maybe write!) Most business professionals put the most important thing to the readers - what they need to do - in the most difficult to find place: in the middle, near the end, or absent all together. Only a tiny percentage of emails - even those written by senior executives - state what needs to get done in paragraph one. This results in confusion that hinders progress and derails projects.

Try It and See What Happens

Putting what you want to get done in paragraph one is a simple yet effective way to get things done. This common sense tactic is rarely used. Make it common practice and see what happens.



Stan Berry has devoted the past 34 years to improving the writing skills of over 55,000 business and government professionals. After completing his Master's degree from Yale University, he co-authored five books on writing that he uses in his seminars. He's been a member of the American Society for Training and Development (ASTD) since 1975 when he served as the newsletter editor and on the Board of Directors for the Twin Cities Chapter. Stan can be reached at www.BerryWritingGroup.com or 612-578-1487.

Stu Tanquist has presented at four American Society for Training and Development (ASTD) National Leadership and TechKnowledge conferences, and written two best selling ASTD Info-Lines. With over 20 years in the learning and development field, Stu's expertise has ranged from working as a professional trainer to serving as a strategic-level director for training and development. He holds three degrees including a Masters in management. Stu can be reached at www.BerryWritingGroup.com or 612-799-1686.



Stu Tanquist



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