

Writing Tip: Five ways to make it easy for your readers

Adapted from *Writing to Get Things Done*® seminar

Productivity Tip

You are more productive when you prominently position your bottom line up front. This writing tip is easier said than done. Here are five things you can do to make your emails and other documents easy to read—and write!



Stan Berry

1. **Figure out what you want to get done.** Sometimes you know what you want the reader to do. For example, you want the reader to authorize a request, or give comments about a recommendation, or put an issue on a meeting agenda. But many times, you might not be as clear. Remember, clear writing is clear thinking. So, when you write, the first thing to do is figure it out—if you don't, you inadvertently play the game of “let the readers figure it out.” And we know how well that works.
2. **Keep a business perspective.** As a writer you might think that FYI is a legitimate mind set, but FYI is confusing to most readers. They stop reading when it becomes clear that the document is FYI with no business application or significance. FYI is a kiss of death to most readers.
3. **Turn the academic model of *Introduction, Body, Conclusion* upside down.** Begin with the conclusion, put supporting data in paragraph two, and give the urgency in paragraph three. This is the model of getting things done.
4. **Put the background explanation in paragraph two—not one.** You might think you are being helpful by bringing your readers up to speed with background information before drawing conclusions, recommending solutions, or requesting action. But for readers, background in paragraph one is confusing, while background in paragraph two is enlightening.
5. **Finesse with tone.** Use the “keep it short and sweet” version of the KISS principle. Get down to business in the opening paragraph and sweeten the tone to encourage cooperation. Play with the language until it feels appropriate. Remember the three ways of putting the purpose in the opening paragraph:
 - Ask a question: *Would you please approve Blackberry voice activation for the Director and off-site personnel?*

- Make a definite statement: *Please approve Blackberry voice activation for the Director and off-site personnel?*
- Extend good will: *Thank you for the opportunity to request your approval of Blackberry voice activation for the Director and off-site personnel.*

If you want to increase productivity, put what you want to get done in paragraph one. Follow that paragraph with supporting information and add a deadline, timeline or urgency. Finally, finesse your message by using a tone that encourages cooperation, and then watch what happens. By following these simple steps, you will be amazed at what you can get done.



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.



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