WRITTEN COMMUNICATION
Additional Handout for Imaginative Communication

Five Basic Principles

Principle 1 Be appropriate.
Not so much what but how, consider the best vehicle to drive your message.

Principle 2 Be collaborative.
Consider how the task and the message can best complement one another.

Principle 3 Be challenging.
Consider what you want your reader to do with the message (everything ought to say 'open' or 'read on') and respond.

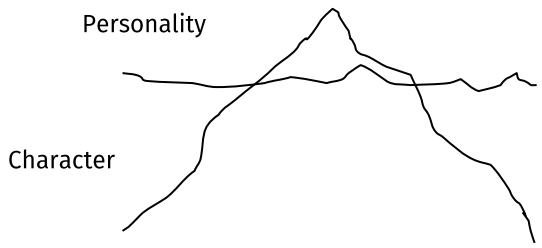
Principle 4 Be a facilitator.
Consider how to move your audience in baby steps toward a greater vision.

Principle 5 Be a prompter.
Consider how to take your message from expression to communication. Move beyond just expression, to actually communicating something.

Qualities of Good Communication

- Clarity.
- Warmth, humanity.
- Engagement with the audience.
- Integrity.

In communication personality may be style, but underneath there has to be character that gives depth and content. Icebergs topple over if there is nothing below the surface.



Getting Started

WRITING THE INTRODUCTION
Starting to write sometimes seems as difficult as shaking the first squirt out of the ketchup bottle. What complicates the introduction are the challenges presented and the decisions required that may affect everything else in the presentation.

Here are some questions you usually have to consider:
- How can I get my reader's attention?
- How can I get and keep their interest?
- How should I handle my thesis – or the point I am trying to make?

As these three questions suggest, most introductions are comprised of three elements:
- The lead (sometimes called 'the hook').
- The reason for reading.
- The thesis.

HOW CAN I GET MY READERS' ATTENTION? DEVELOPING THE LEAD
The opening sentence is somewhat like the introductory 'tease' in a television commercial. Both hope to attract people's attention so they will not turn away. Although advertising writers may rely on visual devices, you must concentrate your effort on a creative word picture. Here are some possible strategies:
- A controversial statement.
- An element of surprise.
- A note of contradiction.
- A short, dramatic statement.
- The use of statistics.
- A figure of speech (simile or metaphor).
- The use of a quotation.
- A reference to a current event.
- Proof of your authority.

Three additional options (for use only in desperation):
- The rhetorical question (can be considered trite, also may not induce attention).
- The definition (a cop-out unless the definition has a twist).
- The anecdote (The story's point must closely align the purpose of the piece).

Sentence two: how can I get and retain my reader's interest?

Let's assume you've written that great hook and are confident that it will get your readers' attention. Now you must develop their interest in their subject. This requires answering these questions:

- Why is my subject important?
- Why should people read about it?
- How will it benefit them?
- Why should this topic concern them?
- What background information may pique their interest?

In short, what are the reasons they should read any further?

WRITING THE CONCLUSION

The conclusion has two purposes:

- It signals an ending.
- It states a resolution or deduction.

Consequently, a good conclusion is both functional and aesthetic – that is, it leaves the reader with a pithy final thought and with a sense of completeness.

The conclusion should not be long. Lingering good-byes may be enjoyable with a loved one, but they bore readers. Three or four well-worded sentences are usually all that you need. In shorter pieces that list a series of points in climactic order, when the most important reason is reserved for last, a conclusion may even be omitted.

The following are suggested strategies for conclusions:

Looking backward: coming full circle.

- This is the skill of completeness and connectedness.
- Return to the introduction.
- Restate the thesis.
- Summarise the main points (only in longer papers).

Examples of coming full circle:

- Movies: The Sound of Music, The Lion King, Awakenings, Ben Hur.
- Books: Philip Yancey's 'Propagandists for the Grim Reaper', The Bible.

Looking forward: forecast the future:

- Call for action.
- Discussion implications.
- Point out the significance of ideas.

Other considerations:

- Don't say, 'In summary' or 'in conclusion' (overused – find a more creative way to signal the end).
- Leave with the favourable impression of a parting handshake – firm and brief.
- Snap it closed. Be very clear that this is the end.
- Conclude with a rhetorical question or a catching statement.

The reader remembers most what they read last. What do you want them to remember?

Edit, Edit, Edit

> 'Writing is hard work. A clear sentence is no accident. Very few sentences come right out the first time, or even the third time. Remember this as a consolation in moments of despair. If you find that writing is hard, it's because it is hard. It's one of the hardest things that people do.'
>
> On Writing Well, William Zinsser, p.13

Ah, to be Mozart! Finished symphonies would flash through Mozart's head, then he would merely write down what he saw. Few writers have this gift. Not even the best writers turn in their first drafts. Editing is to writing what sanding and painting are to construction.

> 'The essence of writing is rewriting.'
>
> Zinsser, p.224

WHAT TO LOOK FOR IN THE EDITING PROCESS

- Cut out unnecessary words (generally reckon to decrease by one third).
- Shorten sentences.
- Construct clear and meaningful transitions.
- Vary vocabulary.
- Improve flow and connection of thoughts.
- Correct grammar.
- Credit your sources.
- Check your spelling.
- Check the accuracy of quotes.
- Are you being yourself?

ECONOMY

Most of us hurry. Whether driving, shopping, dancing – or reading – we seldom do it slowly. When we need information, we want it to the point.

Your writing must be to the point. It must be complete enough to communicate everything necessary to help your reader understand the subject fully, without including unnecessary words or information.

Achieving economy is like dieting: the purpose of both is to remove fat. What's left should be strong, firm and muscular. Remember this: omit any and all words for which you do not have any use. Or economically stated: omit useless words!

EIGHT TRIMMING SUGGESTIONS

1. **Can I remove the relative pronouns which, who, or that?**

- Original: Some people who own sports cars keep them for more than ten years.

- Revision: Some people keep their sports cars for more than ten years.

2. Can I omit there is, there are, or it is?

- Original: There are many opportunities to serve the Lord in our church.
- Revision: Our church offers many opportunities to serve the Lord.
- Original: It is necessary to spell correctly.
- Revision: You must spell correctly.

3. Can I delete prepositions?

Prepositions will swarm all over your papers unless you are careful. The most common is the preposition of. Also be on guard against in, on, by, to and with.

- Original: At the time of registration, students are required to make payments of their fees.
- Revision: At registration, students must pay their fees.

Guard against prepositional phrases: In reference to this subject and in regard to these prepositional phrases, and in view of the fact that you can improve your writing by eliminating most of them, why not do so?

4. Can I delete –ion words?

- Original: The chair made a recommendation that students be given an invitation to provide information to faculty members about proposed new courses.
- Revision: The chair recommended that students be invited to inform faculty members about proposed new courses.
- Best? The chair recommended that students be involved in new course development.

5. Can I combine sentences and omit repetitious material?

- Original: The love of God the Father is pictured in many ways. His love is personified in his Son's death on the cross. His grace was extended to us that day. He further demonstrated his desire to connect with his own by sending his Spirit to indwell us. His Spirit communicates our groanings too deep for words to God.
- Revision: God the Father's love, personified in his son's grace-giving death on the cross and demonstrated through the gift of his Spirit who communicates to God our deepest desires, has become personal to us.

6. Can I eliminate worn-out nouns, tired adjectives, and overworked verbs?

- Worn out nouns include: area, fashion, nature, aspect, case, factor, field, kind, matter, process, situation, type.
- Tired adjectives include: fantastic, good, nice, pretty, terrible.
- Tired adverbs include: really, so.
- Overworked verbs include: the 'be' family: am, is, are, was, be, being, been, were.
- Others: do, give, get, have, hold, make, put, take, enjoy.

7. Can I eliminate dead wood?

- This catch-all category includes phrases like: five in number, blue in colour, round in shape.
- Doublets like: first and foremost, anxious and eager, each and every, one and only. At this point in time, in this modern world of today.

8. Can I simplify sentence structure?

- Original: While he was teaching the class, he noticed that there was a fire.
- Revision: While teaching the class, he noticed the fire.

OTHER HINTS

Look closely at each sentence:

- Can I vary the sentence length and structure?
- Is the verb doing the work of the sentence?
- Circle the passive verbs – too many?
- Put reader in the sentence – is it 'you-oriented?'
- Develop the skill of editing.
- Don't edit too early.
- Allow yourself a time of simply splattering words and ideas on the page. Let your creativity run free. Then come in with the editing mop and tidy up. Separate the two processes (left and right brain differences).
- Read your piece out loud at least once. The ear will often catch what the eye misses. It also helps you feel the rhythm and cadence of your writing.
- Use tools: Elements of style, The Writer's Art, On writing well, English grammar.

Quotes on Writing

Don't give up.

> 'Have a tenderness and determination toward your writing, a sense of humour and a deep patience that you are doing the right thing. Avoid getting caught by that small, gnawing mouse of doubt that whispers 'Give it up.''
>
> Writing Down the Bones, Natalie Goldbert

Blast through writer's block.

> 'There's no rule on how it is to write. Sometimes it comes easily and perfectly. Sometimes it is like drilling rock and then blasting it out with charges.'
>
> Ernest Hemingway

Edit! Edit! Edit!

> 'I have never thought of myself as a good writer. Anyone who wants reassurance of that should read one of my first drafts. But I'm one of the world's great rewriters.'

James A Michener

Rewrite! Rewrite! Rewrite!

'I have a conviction that no sermon is ready for preaching, not ready for writing out, until we can express its theme in a short, pregnant sentence as clear as crystal. I find the getting of that sentence is the hardest, the most exacting, and the most fruitful labour in my study.'

JH Jowett in his Yale lectures on preaching

Write for the senses.

'Nothing is more memorable than a smell. One scent can be unexpected, momentary and fleeting, yet conjure up a childhood summer beside a lake in the mountains; another, a moonlit beach; a third, a family dinner of pot roast and sweet potatoes during a myrtle-made August in a Midwestern town. Smells detonate softly in our memory like poignant land mines hidden under the weedy mass of years. Hit a tripwire of smell and memories explode all at once. A complex vision leaps out of the undergrowth.'

Writing is hard work.

'You are desperate to communicate, to edify or entertain, to preserve moments of grace or joy or transcendence, to make real or imagined events come alive. But you cannot will this to happen. It is a matter of persistence and faith and hard work. So you might as well just go ahead and get started.'

Bird by Bird, Anne Lamott

Selling your idea.

'It's not creative unless it sells,' goes the advertising line. You can have the greatest idea in the world, but if you can't sell it, you won't get very far. What are three reasons why someone else would want your idea or product? What does it promise? How can you make the idea more attractive to other people?'

Creative Whack Pack

God wants to use you.

'In our overpopulated, impersonal world, it is easy to underestimate the significance of one. With so many people, most of them seems so much more capable, more gifted, more prosperous, more important than I, who am I to think my part amounts to much? Before you allow yourself to think that, remember God wants to use you – your talents, your words, your thoughts. Though you may think them inadequate, isn't it comforting to know that He is the One who changes lives – we're just the channel.'

Chuck Swindoll

Leave a legacy.

'What a challenge to us today to join that noble group who has transmitted to humanity its legacy of thought. What a thrill it would be to us to pass along something in published form for such posterity as may follow us. Instead of 'footprints in the sands of time,' we would leave something infinitely better, a word 'fitly spoken' and committed to writing that might influence a life or even save a generation.'

Sherwood Wirt

Holy seeds.

'For those who know and love Jesus Christ, words are more than mere tools of communication. They are holy seeds flung upon the hearts of men, women and children. And when they fall upon soil God has prepared, He will provide water and light for growth. Though the work is His, He has filled our pouches with seed to scatter. So let us sow our words with diligence, care, forethought and clarity. Then we can smile, knowing that the rain and sun are on the way.'

Fifteen Principles for Good Writing

1. **Write to express rather than impress.**
   Don't show off with complexity. Clarify your ideas with simple direct writing. The writer who actually makes the best impression is the one who can express complex ideas simply.

2. **Keep sentences short.**
   Sentences in Reader's Digest average about 15 words. Most scholarly works (and business writing) exceeds 25 words.

3. **Prefer the simple word to the fancy.**
   Apply this to sentence structure as well as your choice of words. Write 'try to find out' rather than 'endeavour to ascertain'.

4. **Prefer the familiar word to the impressive.**
   Remember your purpose is to communicate, not to broaden their vocabulary. If they don't understand the words you use, they are likely to miss your meaning. This doesn't mean that you should not always seek to broaden your vocabulary; rather, you should continue to grow it so to have a wide selection of words from which to choose.

5. **Avoid unnecessary words.**
   Wordiness weakens your writing. Your first few drafts will be very wordy. With each revision, edit words out to make sure every word carries its weight. You may want to edit words first. Next, edit or combine sentences. Then, edit or combine paragraphs.

6. **Choose verbs with action.**
   Active verbs bring your writing to life. Don't smother the action with too many participles and gerunds (-ing words). Write 'We aim to write clearly' rather than 'Clarity in composition is our intention.'

7. **Prefer strong nouns and verbs over adjectives and adverbs.**
   Make sure that whatever is important in the sentence gets in the noun or verb. Use the adjectives and adverbs for emphasis and clarification.

8. **Write the way you talk.**
   Well, a little anyway. A conversational tone is your best path to readable writing. Don't lapse into stuffy business jargon or Christian-ese that doesn't reflect how people talk.

9. **Put the words you want to emphasise at the beginning or end of your sentence.**
   You want to orient them to what's important and help them remember it too.

10. **Use words your reader can picture.**
    Be aware of abstract concepts and terms that make writing dull and foggy. Prefer the short, concrete words that picture things you can see or touch. Include as many sensory words as apply. Principle: show don't tell.

11. **Use short paragraphs.**
    Limit your thoughts to three to five sentences with a strong topic sentence as the first or last sentence.

12. **Master the simple declarative sentence.**
    Learn to make a sentence stand on its own, rather than be supported by clauses and phrases. Complicated sentence structure kills interest.

13. **Put statements in a positive form as much as possible.**
    Your reader will more readily keep reading if they aren't de-railed by a negative and potentially offensive statement.

14. **Tie in with their experience.**
    To make the learning easier, link a new idea with an old idea they've already grasped.

15. **Personalise and add variety.**
    Develop a fresh form of expression that represents you. Don't imitate. Avoid clichés and stilted (though painfully accurate) patterns in writing. You are worth listening to but you must craft your words skilfully and imaginatively for your message to be received and be worthy of their attention and action.

Writing 'Ministry' Pieces

'The medium is the message.' Marshall McKluen
Ask yourself: Why am I communicating?

- Do you have a need? Appeal letter
- Do you perceive your audience has a need? Newsletter
- Do you need to respond to your audience's involvement? Receipt letter

APPEAL LETTERS

Communicating a specific need to an audience and offering them a reason and opportunity to do something about it. For example: building extension.

- Style reflects ministry focus.
- Under the signature of a recognisable spokesman (usually the minister or leader).
- Tone: personal, passionate.
- First paragraph grabs attention/ties to teaser.
- Offers reason to read other than ask: encouragement, instruction, challenge.
- Challenge states specifically what you want reader to do.
- Predictable timing.
- May use attention-getting devices.
  - ⇒ Bullets.
  - ⇒ Two colour.
  - ⇒ Headlines.
  - ⇒ Handwriting.
  - ⇒ One sentence paragraphs.

Appeal carrier elements:

- Ministry name/logo always in the same spot.
- Short (five to seven words) – sets tone.
- Link to visual – reflects ministry style.

NEWSLETTER

- Communicating about the ministry in a way that edifies the body of Christ, offer news, and new opportunities.
- Ministry identity definer.
- Communicate to as broad as possible list in a broad range of topics.
- Should offer something for everyone.
- Balance between ministry news and reader benefit.
- Collaboration between look and message adds interest.
- Style: journalistic.
- Trends: less copy, more white space.
- Identify regular categories.
- Updates on ministry 'progress'.
- Headlines – active verbs and felt needs when possible.
- Focus on making it the most effective 'connection' tool.

RECEIPT LETTER

- Communicating gratitude person to person.
- Make as personal as possible.
- Tone: gratitude for partnership.
- Connect with aspect of ministry that drove donation.
- Reference specific ask.
- Thank them for their gift in first paragraph.
- Establish benefit of gift to ministry… what the gift enables ministry to do.
- Seasonal reference when obvious (end of fiscal year, holiday, etc.).
- Limit to one page.
- Includes business receipt for gift and another response opportunity.
- Conclusion: reference gift and thank again.
- If gift is sizeable, personal letter or contact appropriate.