



# Effective Writing

**E**ffective writing is a fundamental skill in today's society. Mediums range from writing business letters to exam essays to publications. When writing, follow a basic process to make sure your writing is clear, concise and understandable.

## CONSIDER THE TOPIC

**W**hy are you writing? Do you need to persuade, to motivate, to reinforce, to inform? Gear your entire piece to that purpose.

## CONSIDER THE AUDIENCE

**W**ho are you trying to reach? College students? Persons outside of the college community? Communicate directly to your target group. Size is another factor to consider. If your audience is small, consider its special knowledge and needs. For example, a class of physics students does not need to be told who Einstein is. However, if you are writing to inform a large group with a less specialized base of knowledge on the subject, don't assume that they have previous knowledge of what you are writing about. Carefully spell out all relevant information. Everyone may not understand Einsteinian relativity. Write to your audience – make it easy for each member to understand you.

## GRAMMAR, MECHANICS, AND VOCABULARY:

**W**riting is about communicating ideas, and those ideas are ultimately conveyed by the language you use. Thus, correct use of vocabulary, proper spelling, appropriate punctuation and clear grammar are necessary. Invest in a good dictionary, and an even better thesaurus and English guide. Use them.

## SOME RULES OF THUMB:

- Use the active voice.
- Use language you and the reader are comfortable with.
- A thesaurus is no substitute for a vocabulary.
- Emphasize the main ideas.
- Vary the structure and length of the sentences.

## THE "HOW" OF WRITING

**O**nce you know the who, what and why, you can start on the HOW of writing:

### **ORGANIZE:**

A rambling, disjointed, lengthy paper does not have the impact of a concise, organized, shorter paper. First, develop a thesis and stick to it. Then organize your main ideas around this idea. Effective methods are outlines and flow charts.

### **WRITE A ROUGH DRAFT:**

Ninety-nine percent of the time, writing is better the second, third or fourth time around. Writing more than one draft will help you to proofread your organized ideas and give you a starting reference to make your main point even more concise.

### **READ WHAT YOU HAVE WRITTEN OUT LOUD:**

Sometimes, the words on the page do not sound as clear when they are spoken. This lack of clarity could indicate the need for a better format, a different use of language or a different style.

### **HAVE SOMEONE PROOFREAD FOR YOU:**

People tend to be less objective and less apt to notice mistakes after they have been writing and concentrating on the same project for a long period of time. Having a friend proofread the piece will provide a fresh point of view on the work and may also detect additional

mistakes in facts or grammar. Ask that person to summarize the content; this will tell you if you have succeeded in communicating your topic and purpose to the targeted audience.

Writing is like all other skills – it takes discipline and practice to improve. Using these suggestions will give you the tools you need to ensure more effective and concise writing.

–contributed to by Jennifer McClure and Gretchen Frank

For more information on organization and personal development skills in the SOAR series, stop by or call UNL Student Involvement, 200 Nebraska Union, 472-2454; or 300 Nebraska East Union, 472-1780. Staff members will be happy to assist you and answer your questions.

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