The 'Write' Way: How HR Professionals Can Get Results
Webinar Summary and Key Information | May 6, 2020

Presenter: Latonia Page
Full Writing Course: http://go.usa.gov/xy6pm
More HR Courses: https://leadership.opm.gov/fhri

Goals of Written Communication

- Who are the readers?
- What do you want the readers to do with the information?
    - Understand?
    - Respond?
    - Act?
- What do you hope to achieve with the written message?
- Principles of Effective Writing
- Writing is effective when it achieves its intended results
- How can you ensure that your writing is effective?

Plain Language Overview http://www.plainlanguage.gov/

- Write for your audience
- Organize to meet your readers' needs
- Choose words carefully
- Write short, well-structured sentences and paragraphs

Writing Process

1. Pre-write
2. Draft
    a. Flesh-out the ideas you brainstormed
    b. Follow your pre-writing plan
3. Revise
    a. Read over your writing and make initial revisions
    b. Get feedback from a peer to make additional revisions
4. Edit
    a. Check grammar and mechanics
    b. Ensure appropriate organization and formatting
5. Publish
    a. Send an email or letter
    b. Begin the approval process for a government publication
    c. Publish a website
    d. Post a message to social media

Prewriting Techniques

- Listing
- Clustering
- Outlining
- Freewriting

Pre-writing Tips to Consider

- Who is my intended audience?
- What do I want to say?
- What action(s) do I want my audience to take?
- When do I need a response?

Organize Content Appropriately

- State the purpose and bottom line
- Anticipate questions
- Eliminate filler
- Use a table of contents when needed
- Organize appropriately

Techniques to Improve Readability

- Focused paragraphs
- Short Sentences
- Active Voice
- Proper word choice
- Clear Formatting
- Frequent Headings

How to Become a Better Writer

- Practice, practice, practice!
- Read—anything!
- Listen to audiobooks
- Make writing a daily habit in your personal life
- Take on more writing assignments at work

Recommended Style Guides
List of Federal Agency Style Guides
Digital.gov List of Agency Style Guides
U.S. Government Publishing Office Style Manual (2016)
USAGov Writing Principles
18F Content Guide

Q: *What writing style book do you recommend? How do you know what style choice to use?*

A: For Federal agencies, see the list at the bottom of page 1 of this document. As an OPM employee, I use OPM's style guide, but there are many others for Federal agencies. There's also Modern Language Association (MLA), American Psychological Association (APA), or Associated Press Style (AP). You should check with your agency for specific requirements (usually your agency's communications office/department).

Q: *Is there a book that you recommend on business writing or writing styles?*

A: The Elements of Style by Strunk and White is a classic. If you are publishing on the internet, try The Associated Press Stylebook.

Q: *In what ways does listening to audio help with becoming a better writer?*

A: Typically, many audiobooks are from formal writing, vs. a podcast which typically uses everyday vernacular. Hearing formally written material gives you an idea of how something should be written. Also, audiobooks are a convenient substitute when a conventional book is impractical, like when driving a car.

Q: *Any suggestions on how to break up heavy related material, like technical or policy material?*

A: Headings and a table of contents are a great way to do that.

Q: *What is a recommended number of words per sentence?*

A: A good rule of thumb is about 5-7 words per sentence but check your agency's style guide.

Q: *When you say "words" with relation to counting, does that include adjectives?*

A: I typically do not include article adjectives (i.e., a, an, the); however, descriptive and possessive noun adjectives are included. Microsoft Word may count them all in the readability report.

Q: *Can you address prepositional phrases?*

A: Prepositional phrases, while providing additional information about the subject or verb, can often add unnecessary words.

Q: *What are some good examples of when to use either the semi colon and colon?*

A: A colon can be used if you have a bulleted list. Use a semi colon when joining two related clauses (complete thoughts on their own) or separating items in a complex list that also includes commas. Do not forget to follow the semicolon with a conjunction and comma.

Q: *Love the idea to check readability in Microsoft Word. How do you pull up the stats report?*

A:

Windows:	**Mac:**
1. Select File > Options > Proofing. 2. Under "When correcting spelling and grammar in Word," check the box next to "Show readability statistics." 3. Perform a spell check in your document. The readability statistics will be displayed after the spell check is complete.	1. Select Word > Preferences > Spelling & Grammar 2. Under Grammar, check the box next to "Show readability statistics." 3. Perform a spell check in your document. The readability statistics will be displayed after the spell check is complete.