



## **Our writing philosophy:** **Produce clear messages that motivate target audiences**

*by Pete Scott*

**Clients come to a design firm because they want their communications to have a greater impact on their target audiences. A good firm can help its client succeed through careful planning, creative design, and clear writing.**

**Here are some basic guidelines for producing a written message. These guidelines apply to any project—ad copy, HTML e-mail, website content, a business letter, etc. And these tenets apply regardless of the target audience, whether the copy is for a high-tech company, a retail store, or a children’s website.**

### **Always keep it clear**

Sometimes, you want to inform. Other times, you want to persuade. Often, you want to do both. In any of these scenarios, you’ll fail if the writing isn’t clear and to the



point. At the same time, the message should be compelling.

A design firm should follow a careful process to ensure your message is crystal-clear and compelling. The firm's writers should work with you as a team, and never forget that it's your message and your audience.

### Plan and strategize

You must know the players and purpose if a writing project is to succeed. Before writing begins, conduct research and meet with the firm you have selected as much as necessary to answer these questions:

- Why are you writing this? (Define the communications challenges and the message that is to be delivered.)
- Who is going to read this? (Identify the target audience and its characteristics.)
- What do you want the reader to do? (Determine what action you want the audience to take—buy something, learn something, sign up for something, etc.)

After these questions are answered, brainstorm with the firm to determine specific messaging points. The design firm should then brainstorm about solutions. Open, energetic brainstorming is the launch pad for effective writing.

### Tell the story—and make it personal

Now it's time for you and the design firm to actually compose a message (or story) with a beginning, a middle, and an end. It's often most effective to write as if you're speaking to an individual. Use "you" in writing. Write conversationally and simply, but never dumb-down the writing.

Strive to be creative—without forcing it. It's great to use examples and comparisons. It's also effective to appeal to the senses by describing how things look, sound, smell, feel, and taste. These connections bring a message home. They make it relevant. They make it personal.

### In brief...

- Always keep it clear
- Plan and strategize
- Tell the story—and make it personal
- Revise and edit ... and edit some more
- Keep the message clear

### Revise and edit ... and edit some more

Now, the words really matter. If they're used incorrectly or inappropriately, your message or story can be ruined. You lose your credibility if you have grammatical mistakes or misspellings. You bore your audience if the writing is full of jargon (overused industry words that really mean nothing). You lose your audience if you've written too much.


Now is the time to get rid of the mistakes. Get rid of the jargon. Get rid of excess copy. Get to the point.

It helps immensely to have the editing "basics" down. It saves time in all phases of the writing/editing process to know which rules cannot ever be broken. There aren't many, so don't worry. They won't hinder creativity. Knowing them well will actually enhance it.

Here are some editing absolutes:

- Be correct in spelling, grammar, usage, and punctuation.
- Be consistent in style, approach, tense, and tone.
- Be coherent—use meaningful entry points, smooth transition, and well-placed (unforced) sub-titles.
- Remove redundancies; eliminate quotes that simply parrot a previous thought.
- Trim some more—get rid of adjectives and adverbs that don't work; shorten sentences; narrow the focus to the most important messaging.

### A final question

When you think you're finally done writing and editing, ask this question (as if you're a reader examining the content for the first time): Is the message clear? The answer must be a resounding yes—or you've still got work to do. 

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