

The 'write' words

# Writing better business documents



**PROOF**COMMUNICATIONS



# PROOF COMMUNICATIONS

## Do you have to write business documents for your organisation?

Even the world's best-selling writers struggle from time to time and rely on revision (and editors) to improve their drafts. They know that it takes time to write a good document, and that they don't have to be word perfect first time round.

### Help! I've got writer's block

Facing a blank sheet of paper (or screen) is very intimidating. It's not unusual for experienced writers to suffer from writer's block, or struggle over a sentence. To overcome writer's block, try:

- Writing in an environment in which you feel comfortable, perhaps your office, library or home.
- Collecting together all the information you need to help you, for example, case studies, reports, newspaper articles.
- Making the time – do not put it off by making another cup of tea. Sit down and write. Try writing at the same time each day at a time that suits you.
- Making sure you understand why you are writing (see below).
- Using a creative writing technique to get you started (see below).

### Before you start – know why you are writing

Good writers take the time to plan their work and think about their readers. Before you start writing, write one sentence that defines what you want to say, who you want to say it to, and what you want to achieve. In other words, answer the following questions:

#### 1. What do you want your readers to know?

What facts are you presenting? What are going to offer? What benefits will they receive? To offer something attractive, you need to understand your readers, their point of view, how they can be influenced, and their decision-making role (for example, are they going to respond to your document as an individual, as an employee, or as a prospective client).

#### 2. What do you want your readers to believe?

What impressions or perceptions do you want them to have about you or your organisation?

#### 3. What do you want your readers to do?

Have you included a call to action and given contact details to make it easy for readers to respond?

The more time you spend defining your objective, the better your document will be.



## Writing techniques to get you started

### FREEWRTING

Freewriting is very useful because you can do it anywhere and use it for any document, or at any stage of your writing. If you are really stuck, get started by freewriting about your weekend or holiday – anything to get your thoughts flowing.

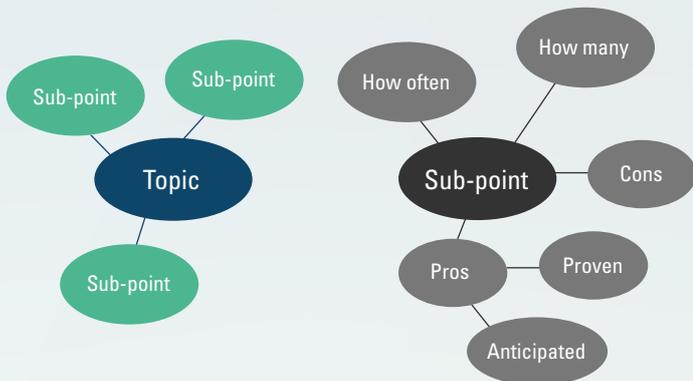
Freewriting is a very personal process, but usually people write non-stop for a set time, such as 5 or 10 minutes. Do not worry about grammar and spelling or the order of your thoughts, as no one else will read what you have written.

### BRAINSTORMING

Many of us have used brainstorming when working in a team, but you can apply it to writing too. Jot everything down in any order, and do not worry about grammar, spelling or completeness. Brainstorm for a set time and don't throw anything away.

### MIND-MAPPING

This is a visual approach to getting started, and is very useful when you want to clarify your thoughts.



## Organising your thoughts

Once you have written your thoughts, review them and:

- List the major subject areas or themes.
- Put the major headings into logical order.
- Break down the major subjects or themes into sub-points.
- Put the sub-points into logical order, such as chronological, advantages/disadvantages, feature/benefit, problem-cause-solution.
- Identify the benefits or outcomes of each point for the reader.

Now you can start writing sentences, but write your opening sentence or paragraph last. Also, make your point quickly, present your key point in the first paragraph, and keep one point in each paragraph.

## Making an impact – style and tone

**Be natural** – write the way you talk.

**Use your readers' language**, such as jargon and buzzwords they are familiar with.

**Avoid abbreviations** familiar to you but unknown outside your organisation.

**Be clear and concise.** Don't confuse your readers with complex sentences – less is more and simplicity speaks volumes.

**Use 'you' and 'your'** more than 'we' and 'our'. Do not start every sentence or paragraph with 'we', or your organisation's name. Turn sentences around to start with 'you' or your client's name, for example: 'ComStar will benefit from...' and 'This is an opportunity for ComStar to...'

## Writing tips

**Active/Passive Voice:** Use the active voice rather than the passive voice. Active is more direct and dynamic. Passive sentences often include 'is', 'was', 'are' and 'being' For example:

**Passive:** The proposal was submitted last week.

**Active:** We submitted the proposal last week.

**Passive:** There was no reply from our manager.

**Active:** Our manager did not reply.

**Avoid long-winded expressions**, for example, 'due to the fact that...' or 'for the reason that...' Instead, be short and sweet by using phrases such as 'due to', or words such as 'because' or 'since'.

**Avoid vague references**, for example, 'the project is intended to...' or 'it seems that...' Be definite, for example, 'the project will' or 'it is'.

**Bullet lists:** If you have three or more items to list, and each item is several words to several lines long, it is best to use bullets and indent each item below the introductory sentence.

If the introductory sentence and each listed item that follows it make a complete sentence, use a full stop at the end of each item. For example:

You can overcome writer's block by:

- Writing in an environment in which you feel comfortable.
- Making the time to sit down and write.
- Understanding why you are writing.

If the introductory sentence is followed by list of fragments, the fragments do not need full stops, except the last one. If you wish, you can capitalise each fragment for greater visual impact. For example:

Rosemary produces a number of free client guides:

- Preparing for Presentations
- The 'Write' Words – Writing Better Business Documents
- Tender Loving Care.

