

kickstart

Gets you started on key issues:

- What are the issues?
- Does it affect us?
- What do we do next?

Communication

Know your audience

Whether you're speaking, writing or making a TV programme, you're doing it for an audience - you're trying to communicate with someone.

What is your message, and who are you trying to communicate it to?

Professional writers and speakers put effort into knowing who they are writing for or speaking to.

Before you start, ask yourself: who is going to read/watch/listen to this?

Picture an individual who is typical of your audience: age, sex, interests, background, education, job... What newspaper do they read, what music do they listen to, what TV programmes do they watch? What is their culture, what are their concerns, their hopes, their fears? What views do they already have on the subject you're addressing, what are their assumptions, their knowledge?

Aim your communication at this individual - use a style, a range of vocabulary, illustrations and references that will engage with them.

Remember: you're not doing this for yourself, you're doing it for someone else, so know who that person is.

If all else fails, write for your Mum...

Verbal Communication

Some pointers...

- Erm...
- Who is your audience? Talk to them, not someone else
- Audience culture - what is the world they live in?
- Watch your body language - it may be louder than your words
- Control your body - mannerisms distract
- Eye contact - establish and maintain a relationship with your audience
- Red herrings - avoid those tempting byways
- Right/left bias - talk to your whole audience
- Microphone use - find out how, and don't tap, trust your PA person
- Use your voice - don't drone, use your range
- Pace - variety: don't lull them to sleep
- Length - will you push the limits of endurance, or leave them wanting more?
- Prepare - don't wing it, but don't read it
- Be yourself - use the style that suits you
- Repeat key information - what date was that?
- Sound bites - they can get you to the top
- The sound of silence - don't be afraid of it
- Jargon - will it draw in or exclude?
- Don't assume knowledge
- Only blind them with science if there's no scientists present - know your own depth, and don't get out of it
- Walls have ears - but is that a reason to talk to them?
- Keep it clear, keep it simple
- Concrete good, abstract bad
- See the end from the beginning, whether talk or sentence, so...

- There's a lot in your head, but we don't need to hear it all
- Who are you doing this talk for - them or you?
- There's so much more I could say, but...

Websites

Know your audience and the message you want to communicate

Remember the web is a visual medium - it's not just words

A web page is a restricted space, so keep it focused

Your users have the whole world at their fingertips - take account of their attention span

Make your site 'sticky' - make the visitor want to stay

Use headlines and pictures to grab their attention

Keep your copy short

Make the site user-friendly, a comfortable place to be - pay attention to design, structure, navigation

Avoid clutter

Use links to get visitors around your site comfortably - where you want to get to shouldn't be more than three clicks away

Put the main point at the top of your story - if you bury it, they won't dig for it

If you're putting on information with a short shelf-life, make sure you're resourced to keep it updated

Salt and Light Ministries Administrators' Forum

For more information on the Admin Forum or KickStart contact mikep@saltlight.org

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Writing to Communicate

The world is full of paper, and people haven't got time to read everything that comes their way. Don't assume anyone will read what you write, unless you're paying them to read it.

If your audience is under no obligation to read what you've written, you've got to get their attention and persuade them to do so.

Plan what you're going to write before you write it; decide your structure.

Use the page to capture the reader's attention - photos, graphics, headlines, captions, pull-quotes, standfirsts, bullet points, boxes, colour and layout can all be used to draw them in.

Break it up into sensible paragraphs - don't present the reader with huge blocks of text.

Write to the required length.

Your opening sentence needs to make people want to read on - if it's dull, they'll stop right there.

For news, remember to get the key facts across at the beginning.

End it well - close the piece with a good pay-off.

Know who you're writing for - and write for that audience.

Know what your message is - why am I writing this?

Decide what response you want, and write to achieve it.

Less is more - keep it brief, to the point.

Help your reader, don't make it hard work for them - if you want them to read it, make it readable.

Mind your language:

- Use the right vocabulary, style, tone, register, complexity, sentence length for your audience and your message.
- Keep it clear and simple.
- Cut out redundant words - keep it tight.
- Use active constructions, not passive.
- Be specific and concrete, not abstract.
- Make positive statements; avoid qualification and evasion.
- Use punctuation for clarity.
- Make pictures with your words.
- Avoid unnecessary jargon.
- Avoid clichés like the plague.

Case study: Jesus

Why did Jesus talk about fishing?

Because he knew his audience.

Why did Jesus use stories from everyday life?

Because that was the best way to get his message across to an everyday audience.

Was he dealing in information or motivation?

Did he keep it simple?

Did he waffle?

Was he the Word of God, through whom all things were created?

Wow!

Mr Kipling's men

I keep six honest serving-men
(They taught me all I knew);
Their names are What and Why
and When
And How and Where and Who.
(Rudyard Kipling)

George Orwell's advice

Never use a metaphor, simile or other figure of speech which you are used to seeing in print.

Never use a long word where a short one will do.

If it is possible to cut out a word, always cut it out.

Never use the passive where you can use the active.

Never use a foreign phrase, scientific word or a jargon word if you can think of an everyday British equivalent.

Break any of these rules sooner than say anything outright barbarous.

(Politics and the English Language, 1946)