

# How to Improve Your Writing



# Agenda

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- Outline the fundamentals of good communication
- The mechanics of writing vs. the art of writing
- Provide tips & tools for improving written communication
- Reinforce the fact that good communication is critical for success



# Examples of Bad Communication





# Common Complaints

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- The purpose of the communication is unclear
  - “So why do I care?”
  
- The “call to action is unclear”
  - “What am I supposed to do now?”
  
- Too much technical jargon
  - “What does this mean?”



# Common Complaints

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## - Poorly organized & formatted

- What are the key points?
- What is more important?
- What is less important?



### Campus Services - Internal Service Providers

#### Helping business units reach their goals.

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The Solution is Usually  
Better Planning and Organization.

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The Mechanics of Writing – 4 Steps



# Step 1 - Determine Your Purpose

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My audience is \_\_\_\_\_ and the purpose of  
my communication is to \_\_\_\_\_ so that the  
reader will \_\_\_\_\_.



# Step 1 – Determine Your Purpose

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My audience is **Mill Street Parking Permit Holders** and the purpose of my communication is to **inform them of upcoming construction on Mill Street** so that the reader will **plan to park in an alternate parking facility.**



## Step 2 – Think About Your Audience

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- How much does the reader know about the subject?
- How much does the reader *need* to know about the subject?
- What's in it for the reader?
- What does the reader care about?
- What information will impact the reader the most



# Step 3 - Gather All of Your Information

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- Determine what information is important
- Determine what information is *not* important
- Organize your main points logically, perhaps:
  - By business priority
  - Chronologically
  - By topic



# Step 4 – Create a First Draft

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- **Introduction/Executive Summary**

This should include your previously identified “purpose,” and depending how complex the communication is, might also include a high level overview of the main points you will cover in the main body.

- **Main Body**

Where you further develop the main points of your Communication – and provide supporting information.



# Step 4 – Create a First Draft

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- **Conclusion**

Recap your main points and your call to action.

- **Next Steps**

Describe what the reader can expect to happen next.



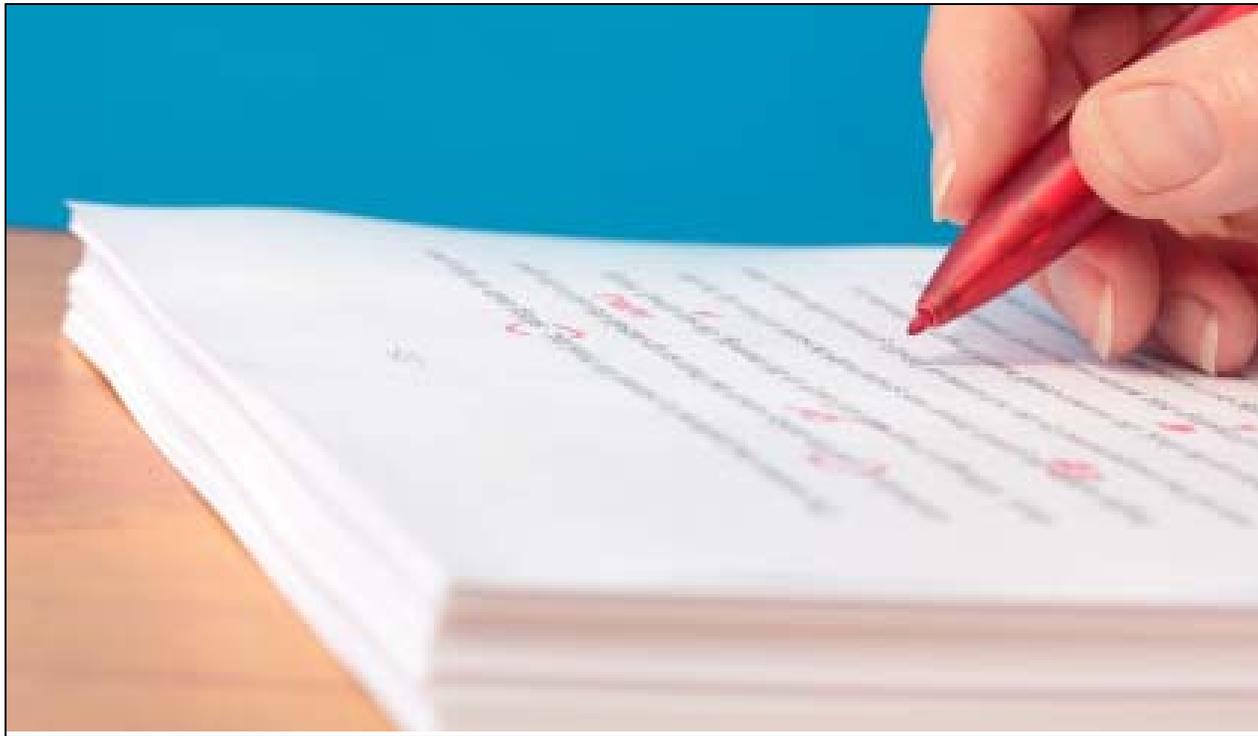
# The Art of Writing



# 90% of Writing is Rewriting & Editing

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- The first draft should not be your final product
- After writing your first draft, put it down and walk away



## Use the Fewest Words Possible

*Maintain structural integrity of the message while removing unnecessary words.*



# Tip for Removing Words

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- Avoid Wordy Prepositional Phrases:
  - ✓ In the amount of = **for**
  - ✓ In order to = **to**
  - ✓ Due to the fact that = **because**
  - ✓ In the event that = **if**
  - ✓ During the time that = **when or while**



# Rewording Sentences

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## *Exercise #1*

Harvard University President Drew Faust has made the announcement that she will retire from her position as President after the current 2017-2018 academic year is over.

## *Revised*

Harvard University President Drew Faust will retire in June.

*Seventeen fewer words in one sentence*



# Remove As Many Words As Possible

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## *Exercise #2*

**Scan the article below and remove as many words as possible.**

It is often said that energy is the fuel for innovation and Harvard's continually growing innovation corridor in Allston is going to need an energy system as advanced as the cutting-edge research being conducted up and down Western Avenue. In order to meet this challenge, the University has designed a lower-carbon, climate resistant, and highly efficient district energy facility (DEF) that's just beginning to take shape behind the rising steel of the new Science and Engineering Complex (SEC).



# Remove As Many Words As Possible

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## *Second Draft*

~~It is often said that~~ Energy ~~is the~~ fuels ~~for~~ innovation and Harvard's ~~continually~~ growing innovation corridor in Allston ~~is going to~~ will need an energy system as advanced as the cutting-edge research being conducted up and down Western Avenue. ~~In order~~ To meet this challenge, the University has designed a lower-carbon, climate resistant, and highly efficient district energy facility (DEF) that's ~~just beginning to~~ taking shape behind the rising steel of the new Science and Engineering Complex (SEC).



# *Avoid Jargon & Simplify*



# Avoid Jargon & Simplify

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## *Exercise #3*

**Simplify the following paragraph and avoid jargon.**

While the new Tomcat 6530.6.7.8 computer system provides extensive memory and is extremely user compatible, it lacks the requisite capacity for calculating at a significantly high rate of speed.

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# Avoid Jargon & Simplify

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## *Exercise #3*

**Simplified version of the previous paragraph.**

The new computer system has extensive memory and users like it,  
but it's not fast enough for high speed calculations.



# Don't Bury the Lead!

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## *Exercise #4*

**Unbury the lead in the following paragraph.**

As you know, Harvard has long been dedicated to sustainability and has set aggressive GHG reduction targets. These sustainability efforts also expand into all facets of University operations such as landscaping and dining. Campus Services employees have been at the forefront of this effort and they should be applauded. With that said, we are pleased to announce that Harvard has been named the greenest University on the planet and to celebrate every employee will receive an extra vacation day!



# Don't Bury the Lead!

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## *Exercise #4*

We are pleased to announce that Harvard has been named the greenest University on the planet and to celebrate every employee will receive an extra vacation day!

As you know, Harvard has long been dedicated to sustainability and has set aggressive GHG reduction targets. These sustainability efforts also expand into all facets of University operations such as landscaping and dining. Campus Services employees have been at the forefront of this effort and they should be applauded.



# Format Properly

*Formatting helps punctuate and clarify complex messages.*

Use formatting tools:

- **Bold**
- *Italics*
- Bullets
- Headings
- Indents



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# Format Properly



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- Finance
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# Characteristics of Good Writing

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*Writing is a skill that only improves through practice and repetition.*

- Simple and easy to understand – Don't write to impress!
- Organized logically
- Resonates with the reader
- Uses the fewest words possible





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