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Written communication

Use this checklist to ensure that what you have written is clear, informative and easy to read.

Written communication checklist

The reader forms an impression of you as a writer based on the facts (content), how these are displayed (layout) and the manner in which you write (style).

Content

- Have you written in a logical order?
- Have you introduced simpler ideas before difficult ones?
- Have you checked the facts?
- Have you checked your spelling, punctuation and grammar?

Layout

- Have you left enough white space on the page?
Layout is important. Do not cram too much text on the page. The greater the amount of white space on a page the easier the text is to read.
- Have you used a legible type face?
A minimum 12 point type size will ensure legibility.
- Have you used capitals and bold type for emphasis?
- Have you used bullet points and lists to help break up the text?
- Have you used colour and images, illustrations and diagrams to obtain maximum effect?

Style

- Have you chosen short familiar words, e.g. 'send' not 'despatch'?
- Have you used short phrases, e.g. 'please contact me' not 'please do not hesitate to contact me'?
- Have you kept to the point, avoiding waffle?
- Are your sentences short?
The longer the sentence the more difficult it is to understand at first reading. Fifteen to 20 words or shorter is best. If in doubt, look for the link words such as 'and' or 'but'. Replace them with a full stop.

- Are your paragraphs short?
Lengthy paragraphs are difficult to read. Start each new idea with a new paragraph. It breaks up the text and is easy to read.
- Have you used active language?
It makes your meaning clearer. For example do not write 'the cake was eaten by the boy' but 'the boy ate the cake'.
- Have you avoided jargon or abbreviations that may not mean anything to your reader?
Avoid vogue or industry-related words. They may mean something to you but nothing to the reader. Use everyday expressions.
- Have you used a conversational friendly style?
For example, do not say: 'It is the author's opinion that' but 'I think that'. Wherever possible use 'I', not 'we'. It is more personal.

Checking

- Have you re-read what you have written?
- Have you asked someone else to proof read what you have written?

RECOMMENDED READING

Bone, Diane (1988) *A Practical Guide to Effective Writing*, Kogan Page, London