

Business and Technical Writing

Write better,
Make more money


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Overview

- Part 1
 - Introduction to analytical writing
 - Techniques for getting the information you need
 - Exercise: questions, answers, writing
- Part 2
 - Introduction to marketing yourself as a writer
 - Exercise: marketing worksheet, mission statement, goals, timeframe.

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“So you see
There's no end
To the things you might know
Depending how far beyond
Zebra you'll go!”



Dr. Suess

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Getting beyond zebra...

“...managers in many organizations do not understand what writing involves... Instead of drawing on writers' abilities to solve complex communications problems, involving them upfront in the development process... (they) are relegated to editing the prose of others.”


From *Dynamics in document design* by Karen Schriver (1997)

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... means understanding...

- **Traditions in Writing:**
 - **Craft:** knowledge of guidelines, principles, rules and procedures in writing and layout. Includes grammar.
 - **Romantic:** unteachable talent, artistic gift. “Taught” through workshopping. Poetry. Novels. University creative writing programs.
 - **Rhetorical:** art of persuasion. Focused on audience needs. Technical, business, speech writing. Film, TV, Internet. 1960's onward in academia. Slow adoption in K-12 and business.

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“... those people who write obscurely are either unskilled in writing or up to mischief.”

From the essay “Science and Literature” by Sir Peter Medawar, found in *Writing to Learn* by William Zinsser

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What did your elementary school teacher do most?

- Correct your grammar and spelling?
- Help you to think through what you wanted to say?

Let's try the second one....

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Thinking through...

"Analysis offers alternatives to oversimplified thinking of both the like/dislike, agree/disagree variety and the cut-and-paste compilation of sheer information. ..."

From Writing Analytically, 3rd ed.

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...means asking questions...

"...a skeptical attitude goes hand in hand with writing analytically. Together they aim not to close things down but to open things up, habitually **seeking out live questions** over inert answers."

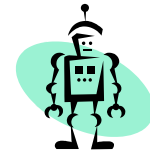
From Writing Analytically, 3rd ed.

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... questions like...

- Who
- What
- Where
- When
- Why
- How....

Okay, a bit simple! Flesh it out...



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... with the Yin ...

Earth, water, and wood



- **Academic world**
- Value reflection
- Understand the difference between ideas, facts, and opinion
- Respect the complexity of subjects that have no single right answer
- Don't arrive at conclusions too early in the research process
- Let the work evolve in response to your evidence
- Converse with sources, not just agree/disagree or parrot

Adapted from Writing Analytically

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... and the Yang

Fire (the hottest element) and metal (the hardest)



- **Business world**
- Limits: budget, time, client as filter, committees
- Client defines: desired action, target audience
- Resistance: desensitization, information overload, competition, programmed or entrenched thinking, clichés
- Complexity: Team work, project planning, document design, illustrations, type of medium, number of words needed, etc.
- Skill set creep
- Learning curves

Adapted from my life

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1. Brochure text "before"...

"The premise that the XXXX is basing its approach to employment development is that Affirmative Action and/or Employment Equity initiatives/programs, although well intentioned, have had limited, at best, success to date. ...The XXXX has negotiated a business partnership with the Province of British Columbia that facilitates the development and implementation of an Aboriginal employment integration / economic development strategy. ..."

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... a few framing questions....

- **How** many words are needed: total? For each area? What is the layout of the brochure?
- **When** is this needed for?
- **Who** is the brochure directed to? The CEO? Other? Where?
- **What** is the target? Just private sector? Include public sector?
- **What** are the likely costs for the company? Direct/indirect? Have there been any ROI studies done ...?
- **What** direct role does the government have and what do they do?

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... and a few more...

- **How** much control does the company have over the process? Who gets access to company information found during the research phase?
- **Why** have other employment initiatives failed? **What** were their results?
- **What** barriers to compliance do you expect or have faced previously? Money concerns, process concerns (committee work), contract/union problems, conscious or unconscious biases...
- **And many more....**

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... and places to get answers...

- Internet ...
 - Articles, books, etc.
 - Similar programs
 - Statistics
 - Quotes
 - General info about field
- Client and their staff; experts
- Existing documents: grant proposals, annual reports, meeting minutes, etc.

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... and finally writing it down...

- Start fresh with the information you have gathered.
- Business writing is NOT about rewriting text supplied by the client!
- Existing text is at best a source of needed information; at worst, a siren call that can lead the project onto the rocks.
- Okay, if anything is usable, use it ;-)

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... to get ...

"The XXXX is looking for business partners in the public and private sectors in British Columbia. Based on a proven model for increasing Aboriginal employment, this is not an affirmative action program – this is a partnership opportunity with a definitive return on investment. ...

As a partner, you take a proactive strategic approach to making sure your hiring requirements will be met by a ready supply of qualified applicants now and in the future.... As a partner, we get to know what employment opportunities exist now so that we can pass that on to qualified applicants in the Aboriginal community...."

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A new project...

- Volunteer client...
 - Brochure?
 - Marketing plan?
 - Website?
 - Other?
- Briefly describe the project.
- Everyone ask framing questions.
- Post questions and answers. Identify sources for information the 'client' can't answer.



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... and some quick results.

- Take 5 minutes to write an opening paragraph.
- Read it out loud.
- Group critique...
 - Clarity of purpose?
 - Target audience?
 - Word choice?
 - Other?

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Your business...

- Getting steady work in the business/technical writing field is the same as anywhere else. YOU make it happen.
- A marketing plan will help you:
 - Determine what you want to do
 - Identify and address problems
 - Plan a course of action
 - Prepare to seize opportunities

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... is part of your life...

- Your professional marketing plan is actually part of your life planning. Consider:
 - Who would you like to be in 10 years? Describe yourself, your job, your life, the different roles you play, etc.
 - Now image your own funeral. Who is there? What are they saying?
- Use the supplied worksheet to arrive at a list of goals. Set a timeframe of achievements.
- Write a mission statement.

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... and don't ask "what life?"

- My goals are to:
 - Never leave my home office except to deposit cheques and do lunch with friends.
 - Work as little as possible without actually having to say 'no' to clients I like.
 - Be good enough that I can be my grumpy self and still get lots of work referred to me.
 - Have my desk cleared off enough that the cleaning lady can dust it.
 - Keep buying more and better toys (aka computers)
 - Go to the SiWC every year.

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