

Writing for BUSY PEOPLE

Readers are busy. They skim everything from emails and text messages, to forms and reports. That's why we developed these six principles to help writers get through to busy readers. They are based on the cognitive science of communication, our area of expertise. In addition to increasing the effectiveness of messages, these principles make them kinder and more accessible by respecting busy readers' time.

More Is Worse ➞

- Use fewer words
- Include fewer ideas
- Make fewer requests



Make It Readable ➞

- Use shorter, more familiar words
- Use shorter sentences
- Use straightforward sentences that a reader can understand after a single read
- Check readability ([link](#) or [link](#)) and aim for a 5th grade reading level or below when possible
- consider translating into commonly spoken languages, if possible



Make It Navigable ➞

- Make the purpose immediately clear
- Integrate ideas so related content is together
- Visually separate distinct ideas
- Present content in an effective format (e.g., tables or figures if useful)
- Consider grouping all asks together



Use Formatting Judiciously ➞

- Use formatting to draw attention to the most important items
- Remove formatting from information that is not critical
- Limit the number of formatting types in a single message



Emphasize Value For Readers ➞

- Make it clear why readers should care



Make It Easy to Take Action ➞

- Make next steps and action items clear and precise
- If there are no next steps, state that explicitly
- Make next steps and action items as easy as possible to follow through on
 - » *Provide any information needed to act upon the request*
 - » *Reduce the number of steps and effort required to act*
 - » *If requesting a meeting, consider proactively proposing a specific date, time, and duration*



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