WRITING WORKSHOP

Introduction to Effective Writing

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Learning Objectives

• Recognize and use the 6Cs of writing
• Assess and address audience needs more effectively
• Organize your document
• Embed planning into writing
• Identify and correct errors in grammar and usage
Cannon Design Vision

PURPOSE
Together we create design solutions to the greatest challenges facing society and our clients.

CORE VALUES
• Honesty, integrity, fairness, humility, and courage.
• Clients are our most important partners.
• Experimentation, innovation, and creativity.
• Collaboration, mutual support, caring and respect.
• Personal growth, productivity, and accountability.

GOALS
• Be the most highly integrated design firm in the world (SFMO®).
• Create a unified environment where teams accomplish extraordinary things.
• Foster long term relationships based on performance and trust.
• Achieve solid business results.
• Endure over successive generations of leadership.
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The Six Cs

• Clarity
• Completeness
• Conciseness
• Character
• Courtesy
• Control
The Six Cs

Clarity

Choose precise, concrete, familiar words and short, clear sentences

Avoid –

• ambiguity – inflammable

• undefined terms – fenestration

• business jargon – manage expectations
The Six Cs

Completeness

Provide all necessary information

- Who
- What
- Where
- When
- Why
- How
The Six Cs

Completeness

Provide all necessary information

A $280 million clinical and medical research building at the Buffalo Niagara Medical Campus houses Kaleida Health's 275,000 sf Gates Vascular Institute; a 200,000 sf clinical and translational research center owned by the University at Buffalo, Buffalo 2020 Development Corporation; and a biosciences incubator. . . . The 10-story, 475,000 sf steel-frame structure is stacked to create common spaces and a unique environment fostering collaboration among practicing physicians and scientists as well as better care.
The Six Cs

Conciseness

Include only relevant information
Avoid unnecessary repetition

Eliminate
• Wordiness – “end result,” “period of one week”

• trite, overused phrases – “at the end of the day”

• Clichés – “I have some good news and some bad news.”
The Six Cs

Character

Be lively

Use the active voice – the subject of the sentence performs the action.

NOT “A design was developed that will encourage collaboration among user groups.”

BUT “Cannon Design’s plan will encourage collaboration among user groups.”
The Six Cs

Courtesy

Put yourself in the reader’s shoes
Use expressions that show respect
Accentuate the positive

From a list of facility needs provided by the users for a higher ed master plan:

“The current facility does not provide adequate areas to fulfill the needs of the expanding growth in environmental education, outreach programs and graduate student activities.”

“Additional instructional/meeting space to accommodate projected growth in environmental education, outreach programs and graduate student activities.”
The Six Cs

Control

Pause and review your writing and tone
Have someone else read it

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The Six Cs

Control

Pause and review your writing and tone

Have someone else read it

Proofread and use spell check

Owed to Spell Checker

I have a spelling checker
It came with my PC
It highlights for my review
Mistakes I cannot see.

I ran this poem thru it
I'm sure you're pleased to no
Its letter perfect in its weigh
My checker told me sew.
The Six Cs

- Clarity
- Completeness
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- Character
- Courtesy
- Control
Assessing and Addressing Audience
Assessing and Addressing Audience

What is their reading environment?

- Clarity
- Completeness
- Conciseness
- Character
- Courtesy
- Control

- Technical
- Admin
- General
- Financial
- User
- IT
- Facilities
- Executive

EXPERTISE  IMAGINATION  PARTNERSHIP  PERFORMANCE
Assessing and Addressing Audience

• Write different parts for different readers
  - Judicious skimming
  - Provide signposts throughout to help them find the parts they want.
  - Executive summary, chapter intros, conclusion, recommendation section, etc.
Assessing and Addressing Audience

• Write different parts for different readers
• Use language they will understand
  - Provide definitions/explanations (including graphics) as needed.
    “parti,” “pro forma,” “mullions,” etc.
Assessing and Addressing Audience

- Write different parts for different readers
- Use language they will understand
- Describe benefits, not features

GVI has 18-foot vertical spans.

So?
Assessing and Addressing Audience

- Write different parts for different readers
- Use language they will understand
- Describe benefits, not features

The eccentric location of the support core required very large ducts and may not have been possible without the 18-foot floor-to-floor heights.

The flexibility afforded by 18-foot vertical spans is important for adapting to new technologies, code requirements and future events. The increased height should extend the life of the building.
Assessing and Addressing Audience

- Write different parts for different readers
- Use language they will understand
- Describe benefits, not features
- Eliminate unnecessary information
Assessing and Addressing Audience

- Write different parts for different readers
- Use language they will understand
- Describe benefits, not features
- Eliminate unnecessary information
- Assume they are busy; be concise
Assessing and Addressing Audience

Practical Applications

- Cover letters
- Proposals
- Project narratives / reports
- Meeting minutes
- Email (and now JIVE)
Organizing Your Document
Organizing Your Document

Writing is information management

- What to include and to omit
- The order of ideas
- How ideas relate to each other
- Order of importance

Writing is thinking

Writing is revision
Organizing Your Document

Organize at the document, paragraph and sentence level
Organizing Your Document

Organize at the document, paragraph and sentence level

- Document level:
  - Decide what overall organizational strategy makes sense for your piece
    - Time order
    - Spatial order
    - Classification
    - General to specific
    - Comparison / contrast
    - Abstract to concrete
Organizing Your Document

Organize at the document, paragraph and sentence level

• Document level:
  - Decide what overall organizational strategy makes sense for your piece
  - Build reader expectations. Meet reader expectations
Organizing Your Document

- Paragraph level
  - Select one idea to be conveyed in each paragraph and state it up front.
  - Provide frequent paragraph breaks
Organizing Your Document

- Sentence level

  - Don’t let sentences get too long
    “This is to certify that under the terms of our contract for the above-named facility to provide services to design, prepare working drawings and specifications, and during construction to make periodic visits to the site and to perform such other required services to familiarize ourselves with the general progress, quality and conformance of the work.”

    “We will design, prepare working drawings and specifications, make periodic site visits during construction, and perform other services required to familiarize ourselves with the general progress, quality and conformance of the work.”
Clarity
Completeness
Conciseness
Character
Courtesy
Control

Organizing Your Document

• Sentence level
  
  - Don’t let sentences get too long
  
  - Use transitional phrases as needed to indicate the relationships among ideas.
    
    - For example
    - However
    - In addition
    - Likewise
    - Although
    - Finally
Organizing Your Document

- Sentence level
  - Don’t let sentences get too long
  - Use transitional phrases as needed to indicate the relationships among ideas.
  - Don’t circle around on yourself.

“We will conduct a feasibility study for converting building X for use as a Y.” The study will determine whether it’s feasible to convert X to Y.”
Organizing Your Document

Revision Strategies

• Outline what is written
• Talk through it
• Be your own skeptic
Organizing Your Document

Practical Applications

- Cover letters
- Proposals
- Project narratives / reports
- Meeting minutes
- Email (and now JIVE)
Grammar Time

Cannon Design

Refer to the firm as “Cannon Design,” not “Cannon.”

When this will result in an awkward double-design, see if you can rework the sentence.

E.g. “Cannon Design designed the building”

In this case, is there another verb besides “design” that conveys the right meaning? (create? plan? engineer?)

Based on the preceding sentence, can you say “The firm (or we) designed”? Is it appropriate to say “provided design services” in this case?
Grammar Time

Semicolons

Semicolons have precisely two uses:

• To separate two independent clauses without using a conjunction such as “and” or “so.”
  
  E.g. “Writing makes me sleepy; I better go get some coffee.”

• To separate items in a list, when the individual items contain commas.
  
  E.g. “Our first step always involves clearly defining the project purpose, goals, and expected outcomes; identifying key participants; and confirming the work plan and timeline.”
Grammar Time

Apostrophes

Apostrophes indicate two things: contractions and possession.

• Depending on how formal the writing situation, you may need to avoid contractions. Don’t use contractions if you need to be formal.

• For singular common nouns and for plural nouns not ending in s, make plural by adding ’s.
  the client’s policy
  the witness’s answer
  the two deer’s tracks

• For plural nouns and singular proper nouns ending in s, make plural by adding s’.
  the users’ concerns
  Dickens’ novel
Grammar Time

Apostrophes

Apostrophes indicate two things: contractions and possession.

• And because the English language likes to mess with us, it gave us these: It’s / Its, You’re / Your, They’re / Their / There.

• Apostrophes do not indicate plurals, not even with abbreviations or numbers.

How many ORs will the hospital add?
The structure was built in the 1960s, not the 1960’s.
There are three PEs on our team.
Grammar Time

Commonly Confused Words

• imply – when a speaker suggests something without saying it directly
• infer – when a listener deduces a meaning not stated directly
• effect – as a verb, means to cause / bring about
• affect – as a verb means to influence
• compliment – means giving praise
• complement – means that two things go well together
• to compose – means to make up
• to comprise – means to contain
  - the building *is composed of* six rooms
  - the building *comprises* six rooms
Summary

• Good business writers use the six Cs of effective communication
• Always write with your specific audience and purpose in mind
• Organize your documents make it easy for your readers to find what they need
Additional Sessions

• Writing Clearly, October 11

• Writing Concisely, October 18

• Telling the Story, TBD
Questions?