Writing and Presenting

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A journey of a thousand miles begins with a single step.

- Lao-tzu
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Some Common Myths

- Good writing is subjective.
- Good writing is all about correct grammar.
- Writing is a talent.
• The Bad News: Writing is a skill like any other, and you need to practice to develop that skill.

• The Good News: You already have most of the necessary tools, you just need to change your approach to writing.
What Constitutes Good Writing

- Convey the important ideas.
- Present information logically.
- Appropriate to audience.
- Good word choice.
- Reads smoothly.
- Correct language conventions.
How Most People Write

1. Sit down and write entire document at once.
2. Quick scan to identify grammatical errors.
3. Submit.
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This strategy has a 0 probability of resulting in a good document.
Start

- Create an outline of the document.
- Start writing.
- If you find you are stuck at a point, continue on to another paragraph, section, whatever.
- Once you have finished or gotten as far as you can, walk away.
- Do not be attached to anything you have at this point.
First Check

- Read what you have at this point.
- Ask yourself if the document presents the information you are trying to convey clearly.
- Start thinking about the order of the information.
- Move, add, or delete paragraphs as needed.
- DO NOT worry about grammar at this point.
- Repeat.
Second Check

- Read what you have at this point.
- Ask yourself if the structure of the sentences are clear and concise.
- Change sentences, word choice, verb tense as necessary.
- Focus more on the communication of the ideas than the grammar.
- Repeat.
Final Check

- Read what you have at this point.
- Ask yourself if the grammar conforms to standard English.
- Change as necessary.
- Repeat.
• Notice that the steps are designed so that you do not have to write the whole document in one sitting.

• Contrary to popular belief, binge writing rarely produces good results.

• A good way to proofread a document at any stage is to read the document out loud.

• Try setting aside 30 minutes a day devoted to writing.
Final Thoughts

- Never get attached to what you have written at any point during the process.
- It is a lot easier to remove information than to add it.
- The only way to produce a written document is to start writing.
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What Does a Report Need to Accomplish?

- Present information in a way that is easy to retrieve.
- Present enough that the results are duplicable.
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To accomplish these goals, a report is divided into sections and the language choice conforms to certain standards.
Title Page

- The title needs to be very specific. Think of it as a one sentence description of the report.
- Your names, the client’s name(s), date and any other relevant information.
Introduction

- Background of your study.
- What has already been done.
- Context of the study.
Data and Methods

- Describes how study is performed.
- Data need to be described so reader can follow along with subsequent analysis.
- Methods need to be described so that reader understands the mechanics and can duplicate results.
Analysis

- Presents the results found during the course of the investigation.
- Details such as p-values, test statistics, patterns, etc. should appear in tables, graphs or figures.
- Present results clearly and logically.
Conclusion/Discussion

- Focus is on speculation of what results mean.
- Do they support or contradict earlier studies?
- Avoid wild speculation.
Report Format

Optional

- Executive Summary - The non scientific version of an abstract.
- Recommendations - Given these results what would possible future studies entail.
- Appendix - Auxiliary information that is not critical to the report itself.
Common Conventions

- Numbering: Sections, subsections, etc. use arabic numbering (1,2,...) with decimal formatting for subsection division.
  Ex: 2. Data and Methods
    2.1. Data Description

- Tables, Figures and Equations have separate numbering scheme, also using arabic.
  Ex.: There is a Figure 1. and Table 1.
  Numbering can also be specified by section.
  Ex.: Figure 2.3 would be the third figure in Section 2.
General Rules

- Use a precise vocabulary.
- Consistency is more important than creativity.
- Give the reader enough information to come to conclusion.
- Include all information needed to interpret data and results.
- Present information in a logically ordered fashion.
Writing Style

Things to Keep in Mind

- Being precise and consistent does not mean boring.
- You still need to give the reader something to be excited about.
- Although it may not be apparent, you are telling a story.
• Consulting reports have an additional challenge since the reader may not be versed in statistics.
• Report also has to be accessible to people not familiar with the report topic.
• Your goal is to balance these two without sounding trivial.
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What Should A Presentation Accomplish?

• The goal of a presentation is the same as the goal of a written document; to convey information clearly and logically.

• Like writing there are rules and conventions that follow when presenting.
A presentation represents you as much as it does the report.
People remember good presentations more than they remember good reports.
It only takes 2 or 3 minutes to lose an audience member.
The Presentation

Preparation

- Do not prepare at the last minute.
- You should practice your talk ahead of time.
- Not preparing guarantees a bad presentation (trust me on this).
When Presenting

- Speak clearly at a reasonable pace.
- Avoid filler sounds ("um", "err").
- Be aware of your body language.
- Keep eye contact with the audience.
- Do not go over allotted time.
Suggestions

- Arrive early to set up.
- Relax!
- Never apologize for nervousness.
- Be confident in your answers, but do not guess.
Final Thoughts

- If everything is going wrong there is a strategy to salvage your talk:
Final Thoughts

- If everything is going wrong there is a strategy to salvage your talk:

  Be funny. Unless you are not funny. Then whatever you do, don’t try to be funny. Seriously, don’t do it.
The Slides

The Purpose of Slides

- To emphasize the main points during the talk.
- Aid in information exchange.
- Assist in comprehension.
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Consider this: “If your slides can stand by themselves, why are you up there in front of them?”
The Slides

General

- Standardize positions, color and styles.
- Include necessary information.
- Limit information to essentials.
- Use backgrounds that contrast with foreground.
- Have logical organization.
Specifics

- Avoid long sentences.
- Generally no more than 6 lines on a slide.
- Choose fonts for readability.
- Avoid abbreviations, acronyms unless already defined.
- Limit punctuation.
Visual vs. Text

- Fact: Text and speech is processed through the same “channel”.
- Result: The brain cannot read and listen properly at the same time.
- However: Visual processing is a different channel than speech.
- Conclusion: Use pictures to convey information whenever possible.
Avoid the Following

- Excessive artwork.
- Fancy transitions.
- Having a title slide that says [put business name here].
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- Having a title slide that says [put business name here].

If you use a template MAKE SURE that you fill in all the necessary fields.
Wrapping Up

In order to improve your skills you need to:
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1. Find good examples.
2. Use them and aim to improve.
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It is really that simple.
Insanity is doing the same thing, over and over again, but expecting different results.