

Words Matter

How to Get Your Message Across: Six Tips to Improve Your Writing

By Allyson Latta, BA, HBJ, and Sue Rosenthal, BA, MA

The bedrock of effective team care is good communication among team members. In wound prevention and management, care and education can often be complex and involve team members with different levels and areas of expertise, backgrounds and perspectives. The patient, family members, frontline clinicians and administrators are all part of the team, and everyone's goal is the best outcome for the patient.

For that to happen, communication must be clear. Miscommunication, as we all know, can have serious negative consequences.

While much team communication is verbal, written communication is vital as well, especially in the short and long term and even with the larger community. Written communication may take the form of clinical documentation, educational materials, papers and articles written for publications, policy documents and more.

Here are six tips to help you communicate in writing more effectively in the workplace and beyond.

1. Create objectives for your communication

Before you write a word, determine your purpose. To keep your message focused, make sure all content in your document supports your objectives. Eliminate anything that does not.

If you have only one objective, your document will likely be short. More than three objectives is generally too many, regardless of the document's length.

2. Make a plan

Remember back in school when your teacher insisted you create an outline for your essay? There was a reason for that. Create an outline, making sure it aligns with your objectives.



Drafting an outline is the most effective method for organizing your thinking, writing the first draft and rewriting subsequent drafts. Without an outline, you risk wandering off the topic, including irrelevant or confusing information and rendering your message unclear.

3. Write for your audience

Know who will be reading your document, and write for them. The words you choose, and the amount of background and depth of information you provide all depend on your anticipated readers. Consider the following questions:

- Does your readership speak English as a first language? The answer to this will guide your word choice, the complexity of your arguments and the degree to which you define terms.
- How technical can you get without losing readers? Precise language is a powerful shortcut to getting a message across. If your audience consists of health-care colleagues who all have university degrees in science, feel free to use technical words, but even then, consider adding short definitions to ensure no one is left behind. When writing for a more general audience, steer clear of occupational jargon; use the essential technical words (in part as an educational tool), but definitely provide definitions.
- Do you need to observe particular conventions?

For example, clinical documentation usually requires specific terminology; some publications insist on standardized formats; spellings might have to be Canadian, British or U.S., depending on the publication and audience.

4. Don't make assumptions

While there is often significant overlap of common knowledge, within a group or generally within

The Goldilocks Question:

How much information is too much, too little, or just right?

Many writers struggle to find the right amount of information and level of detail to convey their message. Too many facts and references to support an argument can be confusing. Too little information can leave gaps and lead to misunderstanding. Get it “just right,” and your reader will learn and benefit from your written communication.

