

Focus Sheet

Answer these questions as the first step in any writing task.

1. Purpose

- A. Why am I writing this?
- B. What do I want the reader to do?

2. Audience

- A. Who exactly is my reader? Do I have more than one?
- B. What is the reader's role: Decision maker? Influencer? Implementer? Other?
- C. What does the reader know about the subject?
- D. How will the reader react to my main message: Receptive? Indifferent? Resistant?
- E. What's in it for the reader? Why should the reader read this or agree with it?

3. Bottom Line

- A. What ONE main message do I want the reader to remember?
- B. So what? What is the impact of my bottom line message?

4. Strategy

Should my message be a document? Or would another way be more effective?

- Phone call?
- Email?
- Videoconference?
- Meeting?
- Presentation?
- Postal delivery?
- Shared folder?
- Other?

Level Up Your Writing: insights from an American writer and editor
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Six step writing process:

STEP 1 Analyze your audience & purpose
Use the focus sheet (reverse)

STEP 2 Generate Ideas
Freewriting, questioning (like roleplaying both parts), brainstorm an outline, Post-it notes, index cards, mind map

STEP 3 Group information: categories, headlines
Outline or categorize your brainstorm. Make the headlines specific, to indicate what you need from the reader.

STEP 4 Sequence your ideas
Put your bottom line on top (B.L.O.T.) most of the time.
Exceptions: bad news sandwich, resistant reader (pave your way, but get there as soon as you can). With multiple readers, aim for the one with the most decision-making power.

STEP 5 Write the first draft
Use your sequenced outline, choose ONE headline, write ONE paragraph for that headline, repeat for each headline. Resist editing (that comes later).

STEP 6 Edit for clarity, conciseness, accuracy, visual design, tone
Use short words and sentences. Avoid the passive voice and overused phrases.

“Our deepest fear is not that we are inadequate. Our deepest fear is that we are powerful beyond measure. It is our light, not our darkness that most frightens us. We ask ourselves, who am I to be brilliant, gorgeous, talented and fabulous? Actually, who are you not to be? . . . Your playing small doesn't serve the world. There's nothing about shrinking so that other people won't feel insecure around you. And as we let our own light shine, we unconsciously give other people permission to do the same.” Marianne Williamson, *A Return to Love: Reflections on the Principles of A Course in Miracles* (New York: HarperCollins, 1992).