STRATEGIES FOR DEVELOPING AN EFFECTIVE WRITING STYLE

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Un stil clar de scriere nu este doar domeniul scriitorilor profesionişti. Oamenii zi de zi avansează parțial din cauza capacității lor de a scrie clar şi eficient.

Toată lumea scrie CV-uri, scrisori de intenție, memo-uri, faxuri şi scrisori de afaceri. De aceea, este necesar ca toți să ne cultivăm un stil de scriere eficient, care să transmită mesajul nostru în mod clar, concis şi grațios. Mai mult decât atât, oamenii sunt implicați în toate tipurile de afaceri, produc diferite bunuri şi servicii pe care doresc să le vândă. Pentru aceasta, ei trebuie să-şi promoveze bunurile, serviciile, imaginea, companiile şi fac asta prin scriere. Copywriting-ul a apărut recent ca o abilitate pe

care trebuie să o stăpânești dacă dorești să reușeşti. Stilul de a scrie conectează cu un anumit public, provocând emoții care duc la acțiune.

Prezentarea se va concentra pe unele aspecte în ceea ce priveşte dezvoltarea unui stil eficient de scriere.

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A clear writing style is not restricted to professional writers. Everyday people get ahead because of their ability to write clearly and effectively. Everyone writes CVs, cover letters, memos, faxes, and business letters. Therefore, we all need to develop an effective writing style that helps us get our point across clearly, concisely, and gracefully.

While everyone's writing style is as individual as his or her fingerprints, every writing style shares the same characteristics:

• It suits the tone to the readers. For example, a respectful tone will be used in a eulogy (funeral speech), but a humorous tone can be used in a speech at a birthday party.

• It is free of errors in grammar and usage (unless fragments are being used in dialogue).

• It is free of errors in spelling and punctuation (unless misspellings are being used in dialect).

• It does not include offensive words.

Writers often change their style for different kinds of writing and to suit different audiences. A good writer should always focus on the subject, audience and purpose of writing.

When a *subject* is selected, it ought to interest both the writer and the reader, at least potentially. It should be within the range of the writer's experience and skill. The writer should not be afraid to express their own opinions and feelings as they are a vital part of the subject. No matter what the topic, the writer is really writing about how they understand it, how they feel about it. Good writing has personality. Readers enjoy sensing a mind at work, hearing a clear voice, responding to an unusual sensibility. If the chosen topic is of general concern, and if genuine feeling and intelligence come through, the writer will be interesting. Interest lies not so much in a topic as in what a writer has made of it.

To be an effective writer and speaker, one must understand how the *audience* is likely to react to what he or she says and how she or he says it. Knowing *who* the writer is communicating with is fundamental to the success of any message. The one who writes needs to tailor the writing style to suit the audience's needs, interests, and goals. Before writing anything that will be shared with others, the audience must be analysed. These questions will be a good guide:

1. Who will be reading what I have written?

Possible audiences include teachers, classmates, colleagues, clients, friends, strangers.

2. How much do my readers know about my topic at this point?

Are they novices, experts, or somewhere in between?

3. What information must I provide for my message to be successful?

Sometimes the writer will have to provide a great deal of information to help the readers grasp the message. Other times, in contrast, he or she will have little, or no, information to add.

4. How does my audience feel about this topic?

Are they neutral, hostile, enthusiastic, or somewhere in between? A hostile audience is much more difficult to reach than a friendly one.

5. What obstacles (if any) must I overcome for my message to be successful?

The writer might have to deliver bad news, for instance.

6. What style of writing does my audience anticipate and prefer?

Of course, the writer will suit his or her style to the audience's needs and expectations. For instance, long, difficult words for young children will not be used. Similarly, the usage of many idioms for non-native speakers of English will be avoided.

In most instances, the writer will have a clearly defined audience, so he or she can adjust the style to appeal to them and help achieve the purpose. Other times, however, the audience will

not be as easy to identify. For instance, one might be sending a CV and cover letter to a job identified by only the most general description and a post office box. In this situation, it is even more critical to get some information about the readers.

A love letter. A business memo. A short story. A poem. An inventory. A letter to a company explaining a problem with delivery.

Although each of these documents seems very different, they are alike in one crucial way: *they each have a clear purpose*. *Keeping the purpose in mind when writing helps to craft a clear and appropriate style.*

Writers have four main purposes:

- to explain (exposition)
- to convince (persuasion)
- to describe (description)
- to tell a story (narration)

Exposition is constructed logically. It organizes around cause/effect, true/false, less/more, positive/ negative, general/particular, assertion/denial. Its movement is signalled by connectives like *therefore, however, and so, besides, but, not only, more important, in fact, for example*.

Persuasion seeks to alter how readers think or believe. It is usually about controversial topics and often appeals to reason in the form of argument, offering evidence or logical proof. Another form of persuasion is satire, which ridicules folly or evil, sometimes subtly, sometimes crudely and coarsely. Finally, persuasion may be in the form of eloquence, appealing to ideals and noble sentiments.

Description deals with perceptions—most commonly visual perceptions. Its central problem is to arrange what we see into a significant pattern. Unlike the logic of exposition, the pattern is spatial: *above/below, before/behind, right/left,* and so on.

The subject of *narration* is a series of related events—a story. Its problem is twofold: to arrange the events in a sequence of time and to reveal their significance.

A written piece often has more than one purpose, but one purpose usually dominates. For example, a letter of complaint will describe, explain, and persuade. However, its primary purpose is to persuade, as the writer tries to convince the audience to make redress.

Style is also created by description, repetition, voice, parallel structure, and punctuation.

The sentence length should be adjusted to the topic. When the topic is complicated or full of numbers, short, simple sentences will be used to aid understanding. When the topic is less complex, longer sentences with subordination can be used to show how ideas are linked together and to avoid repetition.

Clear writing uses sentences of different lengths and types to create variety and interest. Simple, compound, complex, and compound-complex sentences may be mixed for a more effective style. The subject of each sentence will be selected based on what the writer wants to emphasize. Since readers focus on the subject of the sentence, it must be made the most important aspect of each thought.

Key words or ideas must be repeated to achieve emphasis. However, only the words that contain a main idea or that use rhythm to focus attention on a main idea will be repeated. Repetition is a key element in many of the most famous speeches, such as John F. Kennedy's inaugural address. Kennedy used repetition to capture the cadences of natural speech to create one of the most memorable lines of the twentieth century: "*And so, my fellow Americans, ask not what your country can do for you — ask what you can do for your country*." [3, p.187]

The active voice, not the passive voice, will be preferred (especially in cases one needs to persuade). In informal writing, the pronoun *you* will be used to engage the readers. The second-person pronoun *you* (rather than the third-person *he, she, one*) gives the writing more impact because it directly addresses the reader.

The choice of punctuation also has a critical influence on the writing style because it determines the degree of linkage between sentences. Further, it suggests whether sentence elements are coordinating or subordinating [1, p.338].

Diction is a writer's choice of words. Since words have specific meanings, and since one's choice of words can affect feelings, a writer's choice of words can have great impact in a written work. Diction affects the clarity and impact of the message. Therefore, the diction in a specific writing situation depends on context: audience, purpose, and tone. The word choice a writer makes determines the reader's reaction to the object of description, and contributes to the author's style and tone. Writers employ diction, or word choice, to communicate ideas and impressions, to evoke emotions and to convey their view of truth to the reader.

Language is the primary conductor between the brain and the minds of the audience. Ineffective language weakens and distorts ideas. If a writer wants to be understood, and his/her ideas to spread, using effective language must be the top priority of every person involved in the process of writing, regardless of which functional style the written text belongs to. In the modern world of business and politics this is hardly ever the case. In many instances, imprecise language is used intentionally to avoid taking a position and offending various demographics.

Diction is measured from *formal* to *informal* language usage. *Formal diction* is marked by multi-syllable words, long sentences, and a formal tone; *informal diction* includes shorter words and sentences and a less formal tone. Neither level of diction (or any levels in between) is "good" or "bad"; rather, each is appropriate in different writing situations. Any of the generally accepted levels of diction—formal, informal, colloquial, or slang—may be correct in a particular context but incorrect in another or when mixed unintentionally.

English is one of the richest languages in the world, one that offers many different ways to say the same thing. Words must be selected carefully to convey the thoughts vividly and precisely. Words with the precise meanings must be selected. For example, *blissful, blithe, cheerful, contented, gay, joyful,* and *gladdened* all mean "happy"—yet each one conveys a different shade of meaning.

The Elements of Style by William Strunk, Jr., and E. B. White is probably the most famous writing book of our time. This slender little volume contains this advice: ***omit needless words***. "Vigorous writing is concise. A sentence should contain no unnecessary words, a paragraph no unnecessary sentences, for the same reason that a drawing should have no unnecessary lines and a machine no unnecessary parts. This requires not that the writer make all his sentences short, or that he avoid all detail and treat his subjects only in outline, but that every word tell" [4, p.10].

An effective writing style shows an economy of language. When needless words are omitted, *redundancy* is omitted — the unnecessary repetition of words and ideas. Wordy writing forces the readers to clear away unnecessary words and phrases before they can understand the message. Here's a piece of writing advice from a letter Mark Twain wrote to a student named D.W. Bowser: "I notice that you use plain, simple language, short words and brief sentences. That is the way to write English--it is the modern way and the best way. Stick to it; don't let fluff and flowers and verbosity creep in. When you catch an adjective, kill it. No, I don't mean utterly, but kill most of them--then the rest will be valuable. They weaken when they are close together. They give strength when they are wide apart. An adjective habit, or a wordy, diffuse, flowery habit, once fastened upon a person, is as hard to get rid of as any other vice." [5].

His words still ring true. Readers can benefit from plain language and clear sentences. We tend to get carried away describing our activity, products and services, but adjectives often distract from what we are trying to say. Twain's note is a reminder to get to the point and eliminate fluff during the proofreading process.

In his landmark essay "Politics and the English Language," George Orwell wrote, "Modern English prose . . . consists less and less of words chosen for the sake of their meaning,

and more and more of phrases tacked together like the sections of a prefabricated henhouse." He concluded: "The great enemy of clear language is insincerity. When there is a gap between one's real and one's declared aims, one turns as it were instinctively to long words and exhausted idioms, like a cuttlefish squirting out ink." [2, p.9].

But George Orwell didn't just complain. Fortunately, he suggested a number of remedies. His guidelines have become the classic yardstick for a strong and effective writing style.

1. Never use a metaphor, simile, or other figure of speech which you are used to seeing in print.

Phrases such as *toe the line, ride roughshod over, stand shoulder to shoulder with, play into the hands of, an axe to grind, Achilles' heel, swan song,* and *hotbed* come to mind quickly and feel comforting and melodic. For this exact reason they must be avoided. Common phrases have become so comfortable that they create no emotional response. Take the time to invent fresh, powerful images.

2. Never use a long word where a short one will do.

Long words don't make you sound intelligent unless used skilfully. In the wrong situation they'll have the opposite effect, making you sound pretentious and arrogant. They're also less likely to be understood and more awkward to read.

When Hemingway was criticized by Faulkner for his limited word choice he replied: "Poor Faulkner. Does he really think big emotions come from big words? He thinks I don't know the ten-dollar words. I know them all right. But there are older and simpler and better words, and those are the ones I use."

3. If it is possible to cut a word out, always cut it out.

Great literature is simply language charged with meaning to the utmost possible degree. Accordingly, any words that don't contribute meaning to a passage dilute its power. Less is always better.

4. Never use the passive voice when you can use the active.

At the heart of every good sentence is a strong, precise verb; the converse is true as well – at the core of most confusing, awkward, or wordy sentences lies a weak verb. Try to use the active voice whenever possible.

5. Never use a foreign phrase, a scientific word, or a jargon word if you can think of an everyday English equivalent.

This is tricky because much of the writing published on the internet is highly technical. If possible, remain accessible to the average reader. If your audience is highly specialized this is a judgment call. You don't want to drag on with unnecessary explanation, but try to help people understand what you're writing about.

6. Break any of these rules sooner than say anything outright barbarous (extremely cruel or unpleasant, or failing to reach acceptable social standards). [2, p.10]. Orwell finishes his essay: "Political language [...] is designed to make lies sound truthful and murder respectable, and to give an appearance of solidity to pure wind. *One cannot change this all in a moment, but one can at least change one's own habits, and from time to time one can even, if one jeers loudly enough, send some worn-out and useless phrase [...] into the dustbin, where it belongs***"**. [2, p.11]

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