Questions and Answers Regarding Writing for Organizations

In what way is writing for organizations unique?

Subject matter and formats

- Writers must take on a variety of subjects.
- They must produce texts in many formats, from memos, to reports, summaries, letters, e-mail, faxes, and web pages.

Purposes
- Organizational writing proposes, informs, reports, persuades, summarizes, researches, analyzes, evaluates, publicizes, and announces information.

Audiences
- Organizational writing is directed at individuals, groups, other institutions, and to the general public.

Styles
- Organizational writing follows one of several styles, formal or informal, direct or indirect.
- Informal texts are shorter in size than formal texts but may not differ in style.
- Formal writing tackles more complex problems, analyzes them in greater depth, and presents thorough evidence to support its recommendations.
- A direct writing style gets to the point early on.
- An indirect writing style purposely delays key information.

Circumstances

- Organizational writing often takes place in an institutional setting.
- It is generally subject to deadline pressure.
- It is usually written by a single writer, although several people may take part in writing and editing a complex report.

What writing style should you practice for organizations?

General rules:

- Don't waste a reader's time. Allow the reader to "assimilate" ideas and information in small doses. Write simply, clearly, concisely: **be brief!**

- Use words for their exact meaning: **be precise!**

- Leave no doubt or confusion in the reader's mind. Transmit information, ideas, and feelings to a reader clearly, and without overstatement: **be clear!**

- Focus on specifics rather than generalities. Outline ideas that a reader can relate to: **be personal!**

- Write words, facts, and ideas that speak for themselves rather than try to impress a reader: **be modest!**

- Use a minimum number of words to "make a point:" **be efficient!**

- Focus on your reader(s)'s needs: **be aware!**

What writing style should you practice for organizations?

Sentences.

Do's

- Use simple words that the reader can relate to.
- Place important ideas at the beginning of sentences.
- Write important information in a small sentence.
- Follow it with supporting information.
- Use the active voice in order to identify the performer an action.
- Use the passive voice selectively.
- Use pronoun subjects with caution!
- Vary sentence type and length to give "pace" to writing.
- Break down complex and compound sentences into simple sentences.
- Build sentences around nouns and verbs to increase understanding.
- Adopt a "you view."

Don'ts
- Avoid phrases that draw attention to your writing rather
- than to its information.
- Don't use more words than are necessary: competing words undermine important ideas.
- Don't convert verbs to nouns! Verbs are more descriptive.
- Avoid dangling and misplaced modifiers. Modifiers must
- be close to words they describe or limit.
- Eliminate jargon, technical language used in specialized fields.
- Avoid "bureaucratese," imprecise phrasing that makes words
- sound more important than they are."
- Don't use "opening fillers," expressions such as "there is" or "it is" that create an indirect subject.
- Avoid colloquial expressions, "every day" phrases from oral conversation.
- Do not write clichés, overused words phrases.
- Avoid inverted sentences in order to provide information to readers quickly and efficiently.
- Avoid passive verb constructions which create ambiguity.
- Avoid adjectives and adverbs that "slow down" reading.
- Avoid abstract language which creates vagueness.

Paragraphs.

Do's

- Structure your paragraphs carefully to discuss only one topic.
- Reveal the primary idea in a main sentence that usually,
- but not always, appears first.
- Link that idea with other sentences using transitional
- expressions that support or illustrate that idea.

- Compose paragraphs of three types of sentences: 1) main sentence, 2) supporting sentence, 3) limiting sentence that suggests a contrasting thought.

Don'ts

- Avoid writing single sentence paragraphs!

Entire texts.

Do's

- Focus on the receiver of the text, not on the sender.
- Generally include an introduction, a main body, and a conclusion.
- Open by outlining the main idea.
- Highlight important items or sections by setting them off with letters, numerals, bullets, headings, and capitals, and boldfaced, underscored, or italicized script.
- Provide the reader information that explains the significance of charts and graphics.
- Develop parallelism; match nouns with nouns, verbs with verbs,
- phrases with phrases, clauses with clauses, headings with headings.
- Write with unity! Introduce a new idea or information and link it adequately to other parts of a text.
- Be sure that the language of a text respects your reader.

Don'ts

- Avoid redundancy – don't repeat yourself!