Writing for Interactivity

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AMN Healthcare

What is Interactivity?

…And why do we need to write differently for it?

▶ Interactivity

- Onscreen text, graphics and interactions
- Engaging, Meaningful and Memorable
- Applications
  - Online courses and websites
  - Software, multimedia CDs, DVDs, flash drives
  - Smart Phones, PDAs, e-books readers, iPads, Google@Home

▶ Writing Considerations

- Limited screen space
- Scrolling and comprehension (working memory)
- Chunked content is easier to absorb and layout
  - Graphics - White Space - User Interactions
- But it's still writing…

What is Bad Writing?

▶ Exercise: list the worst crimes you can think of

- Passive voice
- Run-on sentences
- Convoluted constructions
- Needlessly complicated words, poor word choice
- Needless descriptors, wordiness
- Filler
- Ambiguity
- Illogical, incomplete, inconsistent

- Ignorance, inaccuracy
- Noun-based, nominalizations
- Disorganized
- Bad grammar and punctuation
- Uncommon acronyms and abbreviations
- Jargon, doublespeak, truthiness and other lies
- Showy, pretentious, boring

● Bad Writers

- Assume too much
- Talk down to the reader
- Are needlessly complicated
- Don't revise nearly enough

What is Good Writing?

▶ Exercise: list the best qualities you can think of

- ◦ Active voice
- ◦ Concise
- ◦ Logical
- ◦ Simple
- ◦ Precise
- ◦ Clear
- ◦ Plain English
- ◦ Few descriptors
- ◦ Verb-based

- ◦ Terms clearly defined
- ◦ Rich content
- ◦ Good grammar and punctuation
- ◦ Good top-down organization
- ◦ Parallel structure
- ◦ Accurate, correct and complete
- ◦ Consistent
- ◦ Command of subject matter
- ◦ Sincere, friendly, unpretentious

● Good Writers

- ◦ Know their audience
- ◦ Speak in a friendly, conversational tone
- ◦ Write simply
- ◦ Revise, revise and revise some more

What You Are Doing Right

- Objectives are clear

- Meaning is clear

- Information is accurate

- Terms are defined

- Abbreviations make sense

- Minimal jargon

- Active voice

- Direct and sincere tone

- Good grammar and punctuation

- Good command of subject matter

What Needs Work

- Sentence structure

- Paragraph structure

- Document structure

In other words, better organization at all levels.

Quotes

"I believe more in the scissors than I do in the pencil."

– Truman Capote

"The ability to simplify means to eliminate the unnecessary

so that the necessary may speak."
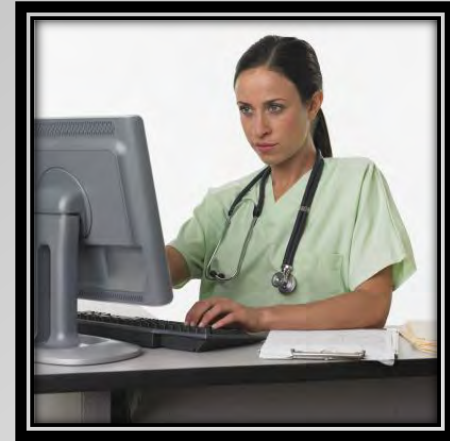
– Hans Hoffman

"Whenever you feel an impulse to perpetuate a piece of exceptionally fine writing,

obey it – wholeheartedly – [then] delete it… Murder your darlings."

– Arthur Quiller-Couch

Advice for Writing New Courses

▸ Start with clear objectives

- Know your audience

- Research each objective

- Keep your sources handy

▸ Set up the document

- Orientation: Landscape

- Size: 10" x 8" or less

- Turn on Document Map

Advice for Writing New Courses

▸ Write the table of contents (TOC)

- Put objectives in logical order

- Convert them to headings and subheadings

- Add any headings that you need to complete the story

- Make sure there are at least 2 subheadings for every heading

- Place page breaks between each heading and subheading
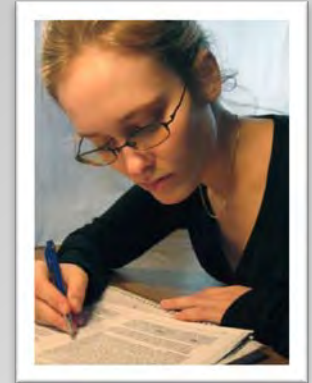
Advice for Writing New Courses
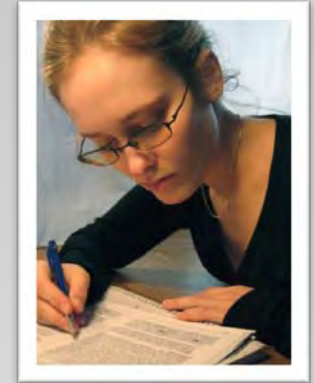
- Write clear paragraphs

    - Stay on topic

        - 1 topic per paragraph

        - Write shorter paragraphs: 1- 4 sentences max

        - Okay to break up topics into multiple paragraphs

        - If you introduce a new topic, start a new paragraph

        - Add subheadings for each new topic – even if it's every paragraph

   - Add new topics to TOC. If it doesn't fit, eliminate it.

Advice for Writing New Courses
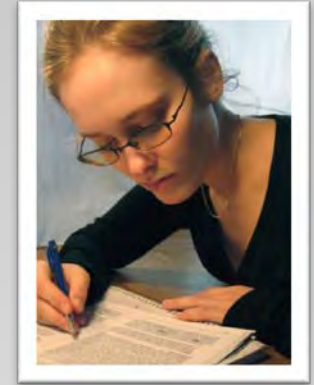
▶ Write clear paragraphs

- Be purposeful

  - Specific to general (start with a concrete example)

  - General to specific (explain theory and show how it applies)

  - Question and answer format (what does the reader want to know?)

  - Compare and contrast or cause and effect (use transitional words)

  - Classification and enumeration

  - Narration, description, analogy

Advice for Writing New Courses

- Write clear paragraphs

  - Create a Flow

    - **Cohesion** – Start with something the reader already knows and build on that

    - **Coherence** – Limit the number of ideas and use transitional words to string them together into a whole
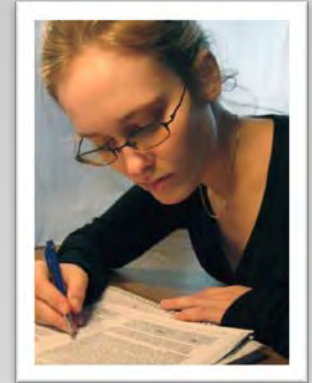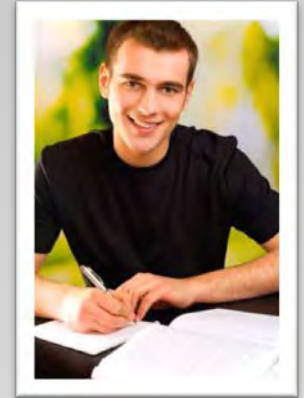
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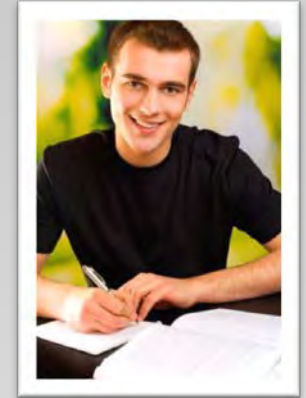
- Write clear paragraphs

  - Make it Logical

    - Provide adequate explanations: spell it out
    - Use parallel structure that is balanced and complete
    - Make sure each topic is sufficiently developed before going on
    - Proceed from one topic to another in a logical order
    - Revise TOC as needed
    - Don't jump ahead or get distracted
    - It's okay to be a bit poetic…

Advice for Writing New Courses

▶ Write strong sentences

- Be concise
- Be simple
- Be clear
- Speak in a plain style
- Write in a verb-style
- Avoid elaborations
- Don't imply, spell it out
- Use active voice

Advice for Writing New Courses
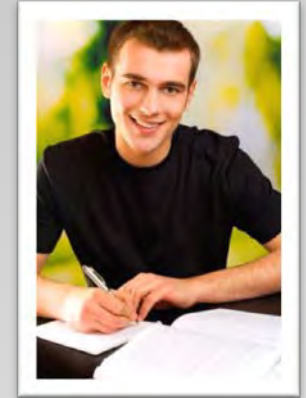
▸ Write strong sentences

- Use shorter sentences
    - Scan for commas and conjunctions
    - Break down compound sentences into two or more sentences
- String together simple sentences unless clauses are essential to logic and meaning
- Check sentences for ambiguity
- Check for passive voice creeping in from your sources
- Know your audience
- Be the reader's advocate

Advice for Revising Old Courses

- Set up the document

- Apply styles

- Create a table of contents

- Boldly revise it

    - Add topics for balance, support and logic

    - Remove topics that seem out of place

- Rearrange content to match TOC: comb out the tangles

- Take out your scissors

    - Eliminate unnecessary paragraphs

    - Eliminate unnecessary sentences

    - Eliminate unnecessary words

        - Eliminate adjectives

        - Eliminate adverbs

        - Eliminate extra articles

Advice for Revising Old Courses

- Use the Enter key

  - Break up complicated sentences

  - Break up long paragraphs

  - Replace comma lists with bullet points

- Then start typing

  - Replace weak verbs with strong ones

  - Rewrite passive voice constructions into active voice

  - Revise any inconsistencies in point of view, logic or content

  - Clarify ambiguities

- Repeat these steps until it's clean, clear and concise – and about half the size

Now, let's give it a try…

Conclusion

Writing for interactivity is, at its heart, just plain writing. The difference is, you have less room to do it in but you also have more options on how to present the material. Where once you might have gotten away with run-on sentences and wandering topics, no more. Interactive formats demand strict organization, clear thinking and concise writing. But take heart! The discipline of writing for such a tight format will take your writing to a higher level of clarity, precision and grace. Take out your scissors and enjoy.

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