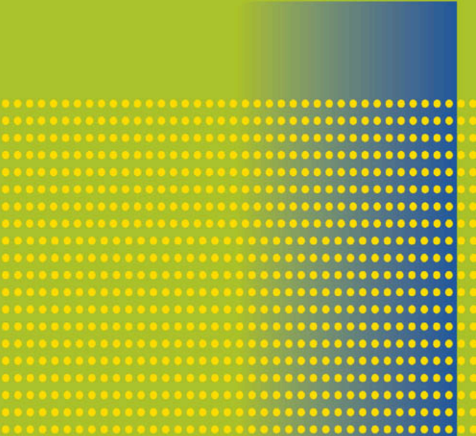
PEARSON NEW INTERNATIONAL EDITION

Guide to Managerial Communication

Mary Munter Lynn Hamilton

Tenth Edition



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ISBN 10: 1-292-02175-6
ISBN 13: 978-1-292-02175-1

British Library Cataloguing-in-Publication Data
A catalogue record for this book is available from the British Library

Printed in the United States of America

Writing: Macro Issues

From Chapter 3 of *Guide to Managerial Communication: Effective Business Writing and Speaking*, Tenth Edition. Mary Munter, Lynn Hamilton.
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CHAPTER OUTLINE

I. Document design for “high skim value”
    1. Using headings and subheadings
    2. Using white space
    3. Choosing typography

II. Clear progression and linkage
    1. Throughout the message
    2. In the introduction
    3. In the closing

III. Effective paragraphs and sections
    1. Generalization and support
    2. Paragraph and section signposts

Writing: Macro Issues

This chapter covers the characteristics of effective writing on the "macro" level—that is, the big picture, the message as a whole. Effective macrowriting makes it far more likely that your audience will actually read and understand what you've written, plus it saves them a significant amount of time because they can easily see your main ideas. Macrowriting issues include . . .

- *Document design for "high skim value"* so busy readers can skim your document (although in some rare cases, because of the culture or context, these techniques are not appropriate).
- *Clear progression and linkage* so busy readers can easily see the connection, logical progression, and flow between your ideas.
- *Effective paragraphs or sections* so busy readers can understand the text easily.

MACROWRITING			
Chapter section	**I. Document Design for "High Skim Value"**	**II. Clear Progression and Linkage**	**III. Effective Paragraphs and Sections**
Goal	To increase readability, show organization	To show logical flow, connect ideas	To strengthen ideas and evidence
Methods	• Headings • White space • Typography	• Throughout the message • Openings • Closings	• Generalization and support • Paragraph and section signposts

Please note that effective macrowriting applies equally to all kinds (or genres) of business writing—including memos, letters, reports, and substantive emails. Therefore, this text does not include rigid genre formats, formulaic rules, or extended examples to copy.

I. DOCUMENT DESIGN FOR "HIGH SKIM VALUE"

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Take advantage of the extensive document design research that shows how to give your hard-copy or onscreen writing what we call "high skim value" (HSV). That is, design your writing so readers can scan the overall document quickly and refer to certain sections easily. Three techniques in particular will give your documents HSV: (1) headings and subheadings, (2) white space, and (3) typography.

1. Using headings and subheadings

Rewrite the top-level ideas on your idea chart to make them into main headings and subheadings, each of which should have "stand-alone sense," limited wording, and parallel form.

Stand-alone sense: "Stand-alone sense" (SAS) means that your headings and subheadings make sense on their own, capturing the essence of your ideas. Many of your busy readers will read your headings and subheadings only, so make sure they see the main points you want them to see.

- *Use stand-alone headings, not topic headings:* "Topic headings" show your main topic categories, but not the essence of your ideas. In contrast, "stand-alone headings" provide the key take-aways of your message.

Ineffective topic headings

- Recommendations
- Methodology
- Conclusions

Effective stand-alone headings

- Four reasons to divest
- Open new office in Singapore
- Empathy: Key to building relationships

- *Use headings and subheadings as a unit for stand-alone sense.* In shorter documents (in which your main and subheadings appear on the same page), your readers can read your headings and subheadings as a unit. For longer documents (in which your main and subheadings appear on different pages), you need SAS in both main and subheadings.

Effective for shorter document:

Use Team-Building to Increase Effectiveness
  At the outset of the project
  At check-points throughout
  At the conclusion of the project

Even more effective for a longer document

Problem: Social Media Efforts Need Overhaul
  CEO blog feels stale and out of touch
  Online user engagement is declining
  Competitors have moved to mobile platforms
Recommendation: Create Unified Social Media Plan
  Engage top management in social media campaigns
  Develop mobile-friendly content
  Create new online user engagement strategy

Limited wording: Don't go overboard with headings: too many headings can actually reduce skim value because the reader cannot differentiate the important from the unimportant. Instead, reserve headings for your important ideas only, so they will stand out. Say enough to create clear meaning, but be brief enough to allow fast reading. In general, limit subheadings (like the ones used in boldface in this text) to six or seven words, but never more than ¾ of the line.

Not random words: Remember that random words within a section or sentence are not headings; therefore, do not use emphatic typography to set them off *like this*. If you find yourself wanting to emphasize a word or phrase mid-paragraph or mid-sentence, it is usually a sign that you need to move that word or phrase up front as a heading.