



Capturing the Reader's Attention

We've all received those letters, memos and email messages that lose our attention. It's easy to ignore a written document that has long sentences, an unclear message or isn't relevant to your job.

Here are some things to keep in mind to help grab and keep your reader's attention.

Write about what is important to your audience. Instead of writing about what matters to you, focus on what really affects your readers so they'll pay attention. A memo to your chief financial officer about a change in employee benefits should have a different angle than a memo on the same topic that is sent to employees. Compare these examples:

- Sarah Johnson will be out of the office next week attending the sales meeting.
- Send your expense report to Sarah Johnson by Friday or your reimbursement will be delayed while she is traveling next week.

Write directly to your readers. Most people like to be considered individuals instead of part of an anonymous group. When your writing reflects that, it will keep your reader's attention. Using the word *you* draws your reader into your writing and makes them feel important. Consider these approaches:

- Employees can make a difference in our community by participating in Habitat for Humanity.
- You can make a difference in your community by joining the Habitat for Humanity project.

Underline key words. Take a close look at your junk mail and you'll notice how key words are underlined individually. For important ideas or results, underline specific words throughout your document. To be most effective, tell a story through the underlined words. For example, in a memo that outlines a customer service issue and how it was resolved, you might underline the past situation, the action taken and the result.

Include visual elements like charts and graphs. Don't lose your readers in long, confusing sentences about the relationship between expenses and

sales or some other business situation. Instead, include a graph that shows the correlation. Your writing can then give additional details or explain the connection.

Answer questions. Before you start writing, take a few minutes to consider your readers' questions. Put yourself in their shoes to anticipate their questions and then address those concerns directly. Don't waste your readers' time by providing information they don't need or want to know.

Keep in mind that writing isn't about you; it's about your reader. When you focus on your reader, you'll draw in your audience and communicate a clearer message.

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