

2017 Quick Reference Guide: P&G Writing in Two Pages

It's really about thinking.

Clear writing requires clear thinking. A well-written P&G-style message is possible only if it reflects sound, evidence-based business thinking, which we've concluded has long been a major competitive advantage for the Company. We've often said that our writing classes should have been titled "P&G Thinking" instead of "P&G Writing," because that's where the greatest value is found.

Rule #1: "Write for your readers."

Everything you see in this material derives from Rule #1: "Write for your readers, not for yourself." We're not saying you should tell the readers what they want to see. Instead, you should focus on answering the questions your readers must have answered in order to do the right thing. You'll find that works much better than focusing on what *you* want to say.

Three important reminders about Rule #1:

1. **Never break Rule #1.** You can break any other rule if it helps you do a better job of meeting reader needs, but never break Rule #1.
2. **When in doubt about any other rule, refer to Rule #1.** If you're unsure about any communication situation, let Rule #1 guide you.
3. **Try to make it a habit.** You'll get the most value from Rule #1 when you've applied it so consistently that it becomes second nature.

On the next page, you'll learn valuable tips for applying Rule #1 by focusing on three priorities: *Content, Organization, and Tone*.

The “Big Three” Priorities for Applying Rule #1

<i>Priority</i>	<i>Tips</i>
<p><u>Content:</u></p> <p>Identify and answer critical questions. What questions must readers have answered for them to do what you want them to do? What supporting details do they need?</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Identify your communication objective. What specifically do you want readers to do or think after reading your message? • Put yourself in the reader’s position with <i>mental rehearsal</i>. What questions would you need to have answered if you had their job and priorities? • Answer those questions explicitly. • Support your answers with details as needed by readers. • Avoid information that’s important to you but not to them.
<p><u>Organization:</u></p> <p>Put the answers to those questions in logical, easy-to-find places: don’t make readers work any harder than necessary to get what they need.</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Plan on “readers” scanning, not reading word-for-word. • State the purpose of the message up front. • Choose headings that align with critical reader questions. • Use topic sentences to highlight major takeaways at the starts of paragraphs. • Interpret lists, charts, graphs, and slides for readers: put the takeaway at the top, rather than forcing readers to hunt for it or figure it out. • When needed, test for mobile-friendliness: send it to yourself and read it on a phone.
<p><u>Tone:</u></p> <p>Make your answers explicit, credible, and persuasive</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Respect your readers’ positions and their valuable time by choosing authoritative, positive, concise words.