

## Setting the Pace

It's horseracing season, and any student of the ponies knows that pace controls the race. Guess what? It works the same way with writing. In this issue of *KB CommEntary*, we explore how to use the concept of pace to make winners of your communications.

## What's Up at KB COMM?

At KB COMM, we provide mission-critical communication and learning services to clients in a variety of industries. Thanks to our established and new clients for keeping us busy. Recent and ongoing projects include:

- Writing and editing numerous information products for a healthcare diagnostics manufacturer, including communications to employees from the CEO and executive leadership team, customer presentations and letters, product marketing brochures and data sheets, and training materials
- Formatting and revising manufacturing standard operating procedures, work instructions, forms, logbooks, and batch records for a pharmaceutical company
- Creating content-rich model documents for CMC modules for a pharmaceutical company
- Drafting CMC modules for electronic submission to health authorities on behalf of a pharmaceutical company
- Reviewing and editing for consistency and accuracy response documents and associated modules for electronic submission to health authorities on behalf of pharmaceutical companies

KB COMM LLC is a certified Women's Business Enterprise. We are officially qualified to participate in corporations' woman- and minority-owned vendor programs.

Please keep us in mind for your communication or training projects.

## Tips and Tales

### Setting the Pace

Of all the elements that contribute to effective communication, perhaps the most fundamental yet least discussed and understood is the pace at which information is presented to the target audience. The pace of information delivery is critically important to reader or listener comprehension: If the pace is too fast, the information can't be processed, retained, and synthesized; if too slow, the recipient's attention wanders and interest in the subject quickly wanes. Either way, the outcome is the same—not good.

Most of the basic elements of written and spoken language—organizational and compositional strategies; grammatical rules; use of formatting devices and techniques such as capitalization, punctuation, heads and subheads, bolding and italicization; and rate of speech—directly control or indirectly affect the pace at which information flows to the audience. Unfortunately, we don't usually learn about these building blocks of language in the context of pace; if we did, perhaps they would make more sense and be easier to employ in our writing and speech.

Let's consider a few examples in written communication.

### Heads, subheads, and body text

Use of heads, subheads, and body text directly controls the rate of information delivery. Each head and subhead is a visually discrete bit of information, and the reader subconsciously pauses after each one. Breaking up blocks of body text with heads and subheads therefore not only serves as an organizational device, but also slows down the pace at which information is delivered.

Conversely, blocks of body text, with lines of text extending across the page and wrapping to the next line, prompt the reader to go faster. And that blank space at the end of the paragraph? Right—slow down and take a breath.

Given this principle, then, longer paragraphs speed up the pace of delivery and shorter ones slow it down. Bullets and numbered lists also serve to slow things down, especially those short, punchy one-liners.

### Punctuation

Periods, commas, and their ilk all are intended to give the reader varying degrees of pause. They're the workhorses when it comes to controlling pace, but are often also the culprits when things go awry. There's nothing like tripping over a sentence cobbled with unnecessary or incorrectly placed commas to make you lose your train of thought (and inner peace to boot). That's why it's worth spending some time learning the purpose and utility of the different types of punctuation so you can use them correctly.

### Capitalization

OK, this is a big one. Capitalized Words Make You Read More Slowly. AND ALL CAPS MAKE YOU READ REALLY, REALLY SLOWLY AND FEEL KIND OF LIKE A FOOL. So please back away from that Shift key unless it's absolutely necessary and appropriate.

### Text treatments

Boldfacing, italicization, and underscoring are additional techniques often used to emphasize certain text and thereby cause the reader to pause or slow down. The first two should be used sparingly, and never for large blocks of text. Italicized text in particular is difficult to read and slows the pace considerably. Underscoring is an artifact of the typewriter era and is correctly employed only as a heading treatment or in similar graphic-design applications. It should not be used to emphasize text. That's what boldfacing and italicization are for.

There are plenty of other pace-controlling techniques that contribute to the readability and usefulness of written communication, but you can greatly improve the effectiveness of your writing by working with those we've mentioned here. The trick is to achieve the Goldilocks standard as determined by your audience: not too fast, not too slow, just right!

And please remember, *when it has to be right*, KB COMM is here to help.

Sincerely,

*Kathy*

Kathy Breuninger

**KB COMM**

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