

Setting the Pace: Instructions Edition

This year's issues of *KB CommEntary* have reviewed the basic principles of effective communication, including organizational strategy and the importance of pace in making writing easy to understand. In this issue, we'll look at how controlling pace applies to writing instructions for completing a task.

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 healthcare diagnostics manufacturers, including communications to employees from the CEO and executive leadership team, customer presentations and letters, product marketing brochures and data sheets, and training materials
- Writing and editing marketing and internal communications for an academic research organization
- 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

Constructing Instructions

If only all instructions were as easy to write as "Insert Tab A into Slot B." When you need to write clear instructions, here are a few tips to help you make sure your directions are easy for your readers to follow.

Use commas appropriately

Commas can make all the difference between clarity and confusion. Whether or not to use an Oxford comma (the one that precedes the final conjunction in a series) is a question that engenders a strong response on both sides. We would argue, however, that when you want to be clear, it is better to use that final comma and leave a narrower margin for error. For example, if you had to disarm a bomb, which instruction is clearer?

Cut the green, white and blue wires.

Cut the green, white, and blue wires.

Are you cutting two wires or three? The second example leaves no room for doubt; your reader doesn't have to guess or interpret what you've written. In this example, the commas perform two functions: They control the pace of information delivery, causing the reader's eye to stop momentarily after each color; and they visually separate the three colors of wire to make it clear we're talking about three wires, not two.

Use acronyms appropriately

If you're writing for an audience that routinely uses certain acronyms and abbreviations, then by all means use them, because they speed up the pace of information delivery in a good way. On the other hand, if the reader might not understand or might misinterpret your shorthand, it's better to spell out the full term or name first, and then provide the abbreviation.

Use direct voice

Direct and indirect voice are also known as *active* and *passive* voice. For example:

It is critical that the equipment be allowed to run for one hour before any samples are processed. (Indirect voice)

Do not process samples until the equipment has run for one hour. (Direct voice)

Both sentences give the reader the same information; however, the second gives clear direction in a brief, unequivocal manner. Instructions should not be open to interpretation, especially when it comes to safety or potential mechanical failure. This example illustrates how passive/indirect voice can slow the pace of information delivery in a way that actually makes an instruction harder to process and understand.

Keep it clear. Keep it straightforward.

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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