



7 Cs of Writing

There are seven important characteristics to consider in any piece of writing. No matter what you are writing, the following essential elements will help ensure that your writing accurately represents your ideas, is well-received, and is understood by the reader as you intended it to be read.

1. Complete

Every paragraph should serve to prove argument of a piece or support its thesis (main point). Each should include a topic sentence laying out the main idea of the paragraph. Following the topic sentence should be sentences offering explanations and support for that main idea. There should be one main idea in each sentence and one idea in each paragraph.

It is also important that the thesis of a piece is covered completely. A writer needs to anticipate questions that may arise from the reader. You must approach a subject from all sides in order to discuss any particular aspect of it convincingly.

2. Concise

Ideally, every word in a piece of writing should serve a purpose. Extraneous words or off-topic ideas distract the reader from the subject at hand. Efficient writing is often the most effective. Omit unnecessary language, clichés, and redundancies. Repetition can be useful for emphasis, but should be avoided unless it is strategically placed.

3. Courteous

In an increasingly sensitive society, it is important to choose your words very, very carefully. If you even glimpse that your language could be construed as offensive or disrespectful, err on the side of caution and get rid of it! Watch your tone and try to read your work objectively before submitting it. Anything that comes across as sexist, racist, arrogant, or condescending -- anything that puts the reader on the defensive -- could completely obscure the content of your work. Be tactful at all times.

4. Concrete

The fastest way from point A to point B is a straight line; therefore, to get your point across, be direct. Use straightforward language and avoid abstraction. If you leave room open for interpretation, chances are readers will end up confused.

5. Clear

Sentences should always be clear. Avoid overly complex sentences riddled with subordinate clauses, jargon, pronouns that are too far away from the nouns to which they refer, and statements that do not follow logically from or are not clearly related to anything previously said. A reader should never have to work hard to follow your train of thought. If they have to put too much effort into deciphering your constructions, they will quickly lose interest.

6. Coherent

All of your written work should be well-organized and flow smoothly. A coherent introduction should draw a road map that the reader can follow through the piece. Appropriate segues and transitional elements will help the reader hop from one idea to another without losing the most important threads of your points.

7. Correct

This is the easiest of the Seven Cs to comprehend, but it may be the hardest to achieve. It is imperative that you make sure your writing is grammatically correct and that it is clean in regards to spelling, usage, punctuation, and format. Nothing throws a reader off faster than sloppy work. Spelling, grammar, and punctuation not only help to make your ideas clear and powerful, but they also amount to your demeanor -- how you present yourself. The more you show that you care about what you're saying, the more attention others—especially your prospects and customers—will give to your ideas, and your ideas are really what matter.

Identifying Problems in Your Own Writing

As an editor, I have run into problems with all of the Seven Cs in the work of even the most experienced of writers. It takes a great deal of time and attention to minimize mistakes, and it is nearly impossible eliminate them completely. And it's a well-known fact in publishing that every book released is bound to be dotted with errors, even after several rounds of editing and proofreading.

Do not get frustrated if it takes some time before these concepts become second nature to you. Before submitting any business document, go through the Seven Cs like a checklist. Try reading your work out loud, or printing out your work, putting it aside for a while, and re-reading it with fresher, more objective eyes. The key is keen attention to detail coupled with a tight grasp on the bigger picture.

Conclusion

These are seven of the most important elements of good writing. Apply these to your own work and identify them in the work of others. Good writing is the key to success in an increasingly text-centric, electronic workplace. Regardless of your position or industry, good writing skills are invaluable.

Reference

Adapted from:

Aaron, J. E. (1999). *The Little, Brown compact handbook* (3rd ed.) [UOP Custom Edition]. Needham Heights, MA: Pearson/Longman.