



Tips for Your Business

Writing

By Dr. Linda Hancock

ABOUT THE AUTHOR

Dr. Hancock has written a regular weekly column entitled “All Psyched Up” for newspapers in two Canadian provinces for more than a dozen years. Over the years, her readers and clients have said that they have benefited from her common-sense solutions, wisdom, and sense of humour. Dr. Linda Hancock, the author of “Life is An Adventure...every step of the way” and “Open for Business Success” is a Registered Psychologist who has a private practice in Medicine Hat. She can be reached at 403-529-6877 or through email office@drlindahancock.com

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Keep it simple - Write the same way that you would talk to a young but intelligent grandchild. You need to tell a story that is interesting enough to capture attention and simple enough to be understandable. Begin by stating why you are involved in telling this story and describe the characters who are involved. Use language that is easily understood and stay away from words that others might not know. Imagine that you are writing a story that will be found by historians hundreds of years from now. Would they be able to read it and not only know what you were talking about but also enjoy it? Sometimes, if I am stuck on a phrase or sentence, I will talk out loud. I begin with "What do I want to say?" and then answer as though I was asked the question by someone else. Then I write down my answer word-for-word. You see, the world is your audience - not just a judge, or a client, or a newspaper subscriber. You should be writing so that anyone could pick up your work and totally understand what they are reading.

The journalistic approach - Have you ever heard of who, what, when, where and why? That is the way that journalists are usually trained to write their stories. You do not need to introduce the type of media sensationalism that is designed to capture the attention of a reader or listener, but you do need to have enough details so that the reader isn't left with too many questions because of missing information. Think about driving throughout North America on a family holiday. You will likely benefit greatly from having a map and watching for signs along the highway. A good introduction will be the map for your reader. It will help the person to know where they are going and what places they will pass along the way. Headings or divisions with numbering or bullets throughout the report are the highway signs that help your reader to know where they are as they travel. Make it easy for the person who has decided to travel with you by breaking up the journey with interesting stops along the way!

Read aloud to yourself - When you have completely finished the work read it to yourself out loud. Use a slow and steady voice but always have an analytical ear. If someone was reading this report to you, would you understand what was being said? Are things organized in appropriate groups? Do you remember the lyrics to the Sesame Street song that asked "One of these things is not like the others? Which one is it? Do you know?" Challenge yourself to ensure that you have things that belong together in the same section. Remember, think like a child - with simplicity!

Writing, whether it is in the form of fiction, newspaper articles, love letters or formal professional reports allows you to express yourself and relay your knowledge to others. It will be most welcome, however, if the words that you use tell an interesting story that the reader can understand and enjoy.

And so, it is time for you to begin. Why don't you start thinking in the most widely accepted format for storytelling? Once upon a time....