

## *Yes, You Can Write for the Journal of the Oughtred Society*

### **Define Your Purpose**

What do you want to accomplish with your paper? Do you want to Educate? Persuade? Explain? For example, suppose you want to write about the slide rule restoration you just completed. Your purpose might be to help other restorers avoid the pitfalls they might encounter in a similar renovation. Or you might want to convince readers to learn how to better use a slide rule. Are you explaining how a particular slide rule was used for some special application? Deciding on your purpose will help you choose the points you want to make.

### **Identify Your Ideal Reader**

Readers of your article are Oughtred Society members, but will have different levels of interest and knowledge in your topic. So, you should consider which members you are most interested in reacting to your article. Will your readers have your level of knowledge? Will they have a good understanding of your topic, or will you have to define terms and explain key concepts? Knowing who will read in depth (not skim) your paper will help you know what language to use.

### **Getting Started**

Here are some simple ways to get started:

- **Brainstorm.** Jot down ideas in no particular order. Some people do this on index cards, using one card for each major point. Others type ideas at random. Still others talk into a recording device.
- **Research.** Talk to other experts. Test a hypothesis. Run an experiment. What have others done and how are your results and your conclusions different?
- **Organize Your Ideas.** Create an outline. Arrange and rearrange your index cards on a table. Take the ideas from your brainstorming, pull out the key ideas, and draw lines to the points that support them. Put your ideas on PowerPoint slides. The idea here is to create a visual representation of the points you want to make, in a format that lets you move them around easily.
- **WIRMI.** According to "Problem Solving Strategies for Writing" author Linda Flower, when you are having trouble writing a sentence, say to yourself, What I Really Mean Is and just blurt the thought out. You can polish the wording later. For now, just say what you think.
- **Talk to Your Reader.** Do not worry about writing each sentence perfectly on the first draft. What would you say if your reader was sitting in front of you, asking questions? You will polish the written form later.
- **Provide a Context.** You have heard the expression, "Tell the audience what you are going to tell them; tell them; then tell them what you told them." If you can write one or two sentences that inform your readers what you will be telling them, why they will be interested, and what they will learn, you will begin to uncover the structure for the rest of your paper.

## Incubate, then Edit

After you write your first draft, get up, and take a break. When you come back to your paper, try to read from the reader's perspective. You are writing for an international readership and posterity, NOT talking to an audience (where body language and voice control also provide information). Will readers understand how they will benefit from reading your paper? Are there acronyms or technical terms that need to be defined? Have you clearly stated the points you want to make? Is there a logical transition between points?

Finally, look for the following:

- **Misspellings and Typos.** Reading your paper backwards helps misspelled words to jump out at you. Avoid jargon, clichés, colloquialisms, and idioms.
- **Wordiness.** If a sentence has too many prepositional phrases, adjectives, or adverbs, consider taking something out or breaking one sentence into two or even three. Reading your paper out loud will help you find the wordy parts – if you have to take a breath in the middle of your sentence, the sentence is too long, e.g., more than 15 words.
- **Active Tense.** Avoid the passive tense as much as possible. “It was decided to begin the restoration with the cursor.” Who decided? What exactly did they decide? Changing the sentence to “I decided to begin the restoration by replacing the cursor” clarifies who is doing what to whom.
- **Complexity.** Use the *Flesch-Kincaid Grade Level* or the *Flesch Reading Ease* options in Word (in the spell checker options) to identify areas for improvement (or from <http://bluecentauri.com/tools/writer/sample.php> if you do not use Word to generate your article). For JOS, the *Grade Level* should be no higher than 10. You may review your article using the Gunning Fog Index, which is available at <http://gunning-fog-index.com/index.html>; the maximum value should be no higher than 10.
- **Consistency.** Use standard abbreviations or acronyms and spell out their meaning on 1<sup>st</sup> usage. Use standard units of measure and monetary values.

## For more ideas

The following are applicable to learning more about writing technical papers (to purchase the books from amazon.com):

[Problem-Solving Strategies for Writing](#), Linda Flower, Harcourt Brace Jovanovich, Inc.

[Writing White Papers](#), Michael A. Stelzner, WhitePaperSource Publishing