

Identify and write for your audience

You have to grab your reader's attention if you want to get your ideas across. Let's face it, readers want to know just what applies to them. The best way to grab and hold their attention is to figure out who they are and what they want to know. Put yourself in their shoes; it will give you a new perspective.

Tell your readers why the material is important to them. Say, "If you want a research grant, here's what you have to do." Or, "If you want to mine federal coal, here's what you should know." Or, "If you are planning a trip to Rwanda, read this first."

Identifying your audience will do more than ensure that you write clearly. It will also help you focus on the reader's needs. Start out by thinking about what your reader knows about the situation now. Then, think about how to guide them from their current knowledge to what you need them to know. To help you do this, try answering the following questions:

- Who is the reader?
- What does the reader already know about the subject?
- What questions will the reader have?
- What's the best outcome for my agency? What do I need to say to get this outcome?
- What's the best outcome for the reader? What do I need to say to get this outcome?

Sources

- Garner, Bryan A., *Legal Writing in Plain English*, 2001, University of Chicago Press, Chicago, pp. 93-6.
- Securities and Exchange Commission, *Plain English Handbook*, 1998, Securities and Exchange Commission, Washington, DC, p. 9.