



Writing Tip Wednesday

NCEH/ATSDR Writer-Editor Services



Three Tips for Writing for a Scientific Audience

Although we often focus on writing for the public, you need to practice writing for your colleagues and other scientists. Here are three things you should do when writing for a scientific audience:

1. Be clear about what you mean.

When writing for the public, you should always define jargon. But you should also think about defining special terms when writing for other scientists.

If you are writing for an interdisciplinary publication, you should provide definitions and examples to help readers understand what you mean. Often, the same term is used different ways in different fields or specialties.

If you are submitting to a major publication in your field, provide definitions and examples to help new researchers understand your work. Yours might be the first or second article they read on the topic. Providing a basic definition can help them learn about the field and better apply your content.

If you are creating a presentation, adding definitions or examples to your notes can help reviewers who are unfamiliar with your work. The notes might also come in handy when answering questions from audience members.

2. Be clear about your point.

Put your main idea first. Putting your main idea up front ensures that readers can follow your train of thought. It also helps people who are skimming for specific information. Your main idea should be clear in your title, section headings, each sentence, and each paragraph. Here are two ways to structure paragraphs with your main idea first:

- Structure your paragraphs with the main idea first, followed by supporting information or more details.
- In some cases, you might start with a transition statement, leading into the main idea of the new paragraph.

3. Have a conversation with your audience.

When creating notes for an in-person or virtual presentation, think of it as a conversation. Your slides can support that conversation by highlighting key points. You do not need to read every slide word for word. Here are two ways to sound more conversational:

- **Use contractions.** We often use contractions such as “it’s” or “they’re” in everyday conversations. It is acceptable to use contractions when giving a presentation. It will help keep your audience tuned in to what you are saying.
- **Include narratives or simple examples that are not on the slides.** People love stories and examples. A good story or example can reinforce your main point and engage your audience. A simple example can be explained in a few minutes or a few sentences. If it takes you more than three minutes to explain, it is no longer a simple example.

Resources

- [NCEH/ATSDR Environmental Health Thesaurus](#)
- CDC’s Health Equity Considerations for [Developing Inclusive Communications](#)
- PlainLanguage.Gov’s [Using Simple Words and Phrases](#)
- [Chicago Manual of Style](#)