PRACTICE

Measure Your Office Communications for Impact

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Excerpted from Writing for Design Professionals, 2nd edition

Ernest Hemingway would never have condoned using formulas to measure the quality of writing. But that doesn't reduce the value of monitoring and measuring writing quality. It serves everyone—design firms, public and corporate facility staffs, the professional and general design media, the building product manufacturing an advertising community, design students and faculty, and, above all, the reader.

Managers in each of these groups should commit regularly—once a year at least—to monitoring their communication program. Do this by gathering representative samples of your entire printed and on-line output. Then subject each item to rigorous evaluation of content and format. Include in the review a marketing principal, a project manager, a cooperative client, and, if possible, an impartial expert. This process alone will help principals and staff realize that quality standards apply as much to communication as to design.

For evaluating text and graphics, consider the set of editorial and graphic judging criteria developed some years ago by New York-based designer Ivan Chermayeff and myself. The criteria are flexible; you should modify them to fit the printed, CD-ROM, or Web product you are judging. Here is an updated, abridged excerpt of these criteria:

Planning, organizational logic

Are the contents logically orga-

nized?
Is the organization clearly expressed through graphics?

Reader's wayfinding

Are charts, tables, and matrices easily understood by the layperson?
Are titles and headlines clearly worded?
Are visual devices (pull-quotes, decks, subheads) used as aids to readers?
Are illustrations clearly captioned?
Are paragraphs limited to comfortable reading length (12 to 15 lines)?
On the Web site, is there a logical progression of content from the home or "splash" page? Are navigation bars provided? Do the links work?

Style

Are words and sentences short and devoid of jargon?
Are spelling, punctuation, and abbreviation consistent?
Is the writing geared to the level of understanding of the audience's

least informed reader?
Is the message intent clear?

Illustrations

Are photographs of the appropriate quality for the medium (print, on-line, video)?
Are floor plans and other line drawings sharp, uncluttered, properly labeled, and equipped with scales and orientation indicators?

Production quality

Is the paper stock appropriate to the purpose of the item? (Brochures can lose points for a design firm because they may be seen as too lavishly produced for a modestly financed client. Others suffer, by contrast, because they might seem stingily produced for a patron with luxury tastes.)
Is the printing good, not blurred or smudged?
Are the four process colors printed in good register, with no individual colors showing at the edges?
On a promotional CD-ROM or Web

site, are images clear? Was the content formatted to the typical user's probable bandwidth?

Count the average number of words per sentence.
Add items 2 and 3, then multiply the result by 0.4.

SUBJECT	EDITORIAL	GRAPHIC
Planning, Organizational Logic	+2	+1
Reader's Wayfinding	+2	0
Style	0	0
Illustrations	NA	-1
Production Quality	NA	+3
Sparkle	+2	+2
Averages (Rounded Off)	6÷4=1.5	5÷6=1.0

Sparkle

Is the overall impact one of freshness, imagination, and originality? We also devised a scoring method for judging editorial and graphic quality. Each item is rated on a scale from -3 to +3. Best is +3. Each of the columns—one for editorial, one for graphic quality—is then added up, and overall averages computed. (In the example below, numbers are imaginary, not based on an actual item.) Clearly, there's much room for improvement.

Measuring written text

Among ways to measure a text without graphics, best know is the Fog Index, [http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Gunning-Fog_Index] devised by the late Robert Gunning. It rewards clarity by penalizing you for using words that run to too many syllables. You are also penalized for overly long sentences. The index is tied to the presumed level of comprfehension of the audience; this is measured by years of schooling. Thus a Fog Index of 17 presumes 17 years of schooling. The Fog Index works as follows:
Select a 100-word passage.
Count the number of words of three syllables or more.

The result is your Fog Index.

Typical Fog Indexes of professional magazines recently scanned are *Metropolis: 15; Architecture: 15 Architectural Record: 13.* Mass circulation magazines such as *People and Reader's Digest* typically clock in at less than 10.

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Reference:
From "Praise for the First Edition," excerpted from the flyleaf of *Writing for Design Professionals,* 2nd edition: "Kliment has written a no-nonsense, step-by-step primer on communication and, when you see it, you will say, 'Of course! Why didn't someone write this book years ago?' … The book is engaging as a straight read, but it is also exceptionally well organized and, therefore, a handy reference … Whether you're a seasoned professional or architecture student, I'll wager you'll enjoy and learn from *Writing for Design Professionals.* Write and tell me all about it (after you read the book!)."—Stephanie Stubbs, Assoc. AIA, *AIArchitect*

For more information on *Writing for Design Professionals,* 2nd ed., visit the AIA Web site [https://aia-tims-snet.uapps.net/timssnet/products/tnt_products.cfm?SR=1&action=long&primary_id=0393731855] or call 800-365-2724, option 4.