Lecture 6

Defining Objectives II + Appropriateness

In this lecture you will learn to

• Identify the tasks you will help your readers perform while they read.
• Tell how you want to change the readers’ attitudes.
• Learn your readers’ important characteristics.
• Learn who all your readers will be.

• Fill in a sample worksheet that should be kept in mind when defining objectives.
• Learn the importance of ‘Appropriateness’ in business and technical communication.

Guideline 2

Identify the tasks you will help your readers perform while they read.

When you identify the tasks, you are describing the enabling element of purpose.

At a general level all tasks are the same for all readers.

Readers perform tasks of locating, understanding, and using information in many ways, depending on the situation.

For example Ali’s progress report would be read from front to back by the vice presidents.

As discussed earlier, not only do readers vary but different reader’s tasks are helped by different writing strategies.

When writing, part of your aim is to enable your readers to perform their reading tasks quickly and efficiently.

Example

Consider the example of Ayesha, an engineer employed by a Steel Mill.

Her task is to study two types of furnaces and present a proposal to help the upper management decide which one to buy.

She has two options to present the immense amount information she has gathered.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Divided Pattern</th>
<th>Alternating Pattern</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td><strong>Furnace A</strong></td>
<td><strong>Cost</strong></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Cost</td>
<td>Furnace A</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Efficiency</td>
<td>Furnace B</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Construction</td>
<td><strong>Efficiency</strong></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Time</td>
<td>Furnace A</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Air pollution</td>
<td>Furnace B</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Furnace A</strong></td>
<td><strong>Construction Time</strong></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Cost</td>
<td>Furnace A</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Efficiency</td>
<td>Furnace B</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Construction</td>
<td><strong>Air Pollution</strong></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Time</td>
<td>Furnace A</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Air pollution</td>
<td>Furnace B</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
As the information in both the patterns is exactly the same she cannot decide for herself which furnace to choose.

But she has produce the results of her study in a manner so that it is easy for to her superiors to judge the best path.

Should she choose a writing pattern which is easier to write?

But then ease of writing is a writer-centered consideration, not a reader-centered one.

She should choose a *alternating pattern* keeping in view the reader-centered approach.

She knows that her readers will surely want to compare the two furnaces in detail in terms of various criteria they consider important.

Identify the questions your readers will ask.

- Then identify the strategy to answer all these questions.
- Finally identify the ways your readers will use your answers.

**Guideline 3**

Consider how you want your communication to alter the readers’ attitudes.

Begin by identifying the attitudes you want to alter.

- Sometimes you will want to *reinforce* an existing attitude.
  
  For example you might aim your presentation so the readers feel more favorably impressed by your qualifications.

  At other times you might you might try to *reverse* an attitude you want your readers to abandon.

  For Example you might want to persuade them to like something they don't like.

You might need to persuade them that a problem exists where they feel that everything is fine.

Finally at times you might need to shape your readers attitude about a subject, they haven't thought about seriously.

**Tell How you want to change Reader’s attitudes**

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>The way things are now</th>
<th>You act (You write)</th>
<th>The way you want things to be</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Your reader is a manager who wants to decide whether or not to purchase a certain piece of equipment</td>
<td>You write a memo evaluating the equipment in terms of the benefits it will bring the company</td>
<td>The manager decides to buy the equipment and feels confident that he has made the right decision.</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
The way things are now | You act (You write) | The way you want things to be
---|---|---
Your reader is the director of a plant that is using an outdated process. The director feels that the process is fine. | You write a report on problems with the current process and all ways, they can be overcome by various new processes. | After reading your report, the plant director feels that the process being used now is faulty and a new one is necessary.

The way things are now | You act (You write) | The way you want things to be
---|---|---
Your readers are bank clerks who will be using the computer system. They are afraid if the new system and are therefore reluctant to use them | You write a procedure manual that shows how easy it is to use the new system. | The bank clerks feel relaxed and self-confident after learning how to use the new system from your procedure manual.

Guideline 4

Identify and learn about your readers’ important characteristics.

You might want to think of your readers in terms of the following three roles.
• Decision Makers
• Advisors
• Implementers

**Learn your reader’s important characteristics.**

Decision makers
The decision makers role is to say how the organization, or some part, will act when confronted with a particular situation.
Advisors
Advisors provide information and advice for the decision makers.

Implementers
Implementers carry out the decisions that have been made.

Familiarity with your topic

• Your readers’ familiarity with your topic will determine the amount of background information you will need to make your communication understandable to your audience.
• Keep in mind that people unfamiliar to your topic will also want you to explain how the information relates to them.

Preferred Communication Style

• Most people have preferences concerning the style of communication they read.
• To a certain extent the people’s communication preferences are shaped by the customary practices in the organization that employ them.
• Information style may vary from the simple prose writing to illustration with tables, graphs and charts etc.

Special Factors

• Each reader is unique, so you should be on the lookout for special reader characteristics you would not normally need to consider.
• For example you might be facing an individual who detests certain words, insists on phrasing certain statement etc.
• Sometimes you will also need to consider the settings in which your reader will be reading.

How to Consolidate Information about Readers

• You must consolidate all information in the same way that will let you keep the key points about your audience in mind as you write.
• Remember, you should view the key points not merely as list of facts but as a dynamic resource you can use to guide you as you perform rest of your writing tasks.

Guideline 5
Learn who all your readers will be.
• Phantom readers
• Future Readers
• Complex Readers

Phantom Readers
• In some situations most important readers may be hidden from you.
• Written communications addressed to one person are used by others.
• These real but unnamed readers are called phantom readers.
Future Readers

While identifying your readers you should keep in mind the possibility that your communication may be used weeks, months or even years from now.

**Worksheet**

**Defining Objectives**

**Overall Purpose**
What are you writing?
What prompts you to write?
What outcome do you desire?

**Reader Profile**
Who is the primary reader?
What is the reader’s relationship to you?

- What are your reader’s job title and responsibilities?
- Who else might read your communication?
- How familiar is the reader with your communication?
- How familiar is the reader with your specialty?
- Does your reader have communication preferences?

**Readers Information Needs**
What are the key questions your reader will ask while reading?

How will your reader search for answers?
- Sequential reading from beginning to end
- Selective reading, only looking for key terms.
- Other (Explain)
How will the reader use the information you provide?

_____ Compare point by point (What will be the points of comparison)
_____ Attempt to determine how the information you provide will affect him
_____ Attempt to determine how the information you provide will affect the organization
_____ Follow instructions step by step
_____ Other (Explain)

Readers Attitude

What is the reader’s attitude towards your subject?

What is the reader’s attitude towards you?

Worksheet

Defining Objective

Overall Purpose

What are you writing?
A proposal that our Software Company Adam Soft, should assign the international projects to most reliable engineers.

What prompts you to write?
I think this way we would complete foreign projects promptly and build company’s credibility.

What outcome do you desire?
I would like the new method to be put to affect as soon as possible.

Reader Profile

Who is the primary reader?
Ms. Zahra Saeed

What is the reader’s relationship to you?
We see each other daily, but still have a formal relationship.

What are your reader’s job title and responsibilities?
She is the Head of the project assignment committee for Adam Soft.

Who else might read your communication?
Mr. Omair Hafeez and Mr. Khawaja Usman, Miss Zahra’s chief assistants.
How familiar is the reader with your communication?
_She is the head of the present system of assigning. She has used the current system for 3 years. She doesn’t know that I am proposing an alternative._

How familiar is the reader with your specialty?
_Very familiar._

Does your reader have communication preferences?
_She likes all the communications to be “business like”. _

**Readers Information Needs**

What are the key questions your reader will ask while reading?
*What makes you think that something is wrong with the present system?*
*What will be the criteria for selecting the appropriate engineer for a particular project?*
*How exactly would the new system work?*
*What would I have to do differently?*

How will your reader search for answers?
*Yes_ Sequential reading from beginning to end
*Yes_ Selective reading, only looking for key terms.
____ Other (Explain)
_She would probably skip through it, but would later read it from front to back_

How will the reader use the information you provide?
*Yes_ Compare point by point (What will be the points of comparison)
*Yes_ Attempt to determine how the information you provide will affect him
*Yes_ Attempt to determine how the information you provide will affect the organization
*Yes_ Follow instructions step by step
____ Other (Explain)
_She would compare the current system with mine in terms of cost speed and efficiency._

**Readers Attitude**

What is the reader’s attitude towards your subject?
_She is not in favor of the new system, she thinks that it will create competition among the new employers._

What is the reader’s attitude towards you?
_She thinks of me as a novice._
Revision
Guidelines
Identifying the Readers by Role
Decision Makers
Advisors
Implementers

Identifying the Readers by Type
Phantom Readers
Future Readers

Appropriateness

Make your document appropriate to your goals in writing it, your audience's purpose in reading it, and the specific institutional contexts in which it is written and read.

Because a reader's knowledge or experience determines the level of comprehension of technical material, appropriateness is largely determined by your audience.

For example, a fact expressed in a mathematical equation may not be effective in a report addressed to a managerial audience.

All technical writing should also be appropriate to the specific institutional context that motivated its creation.

It should not only serve the writer's and the reader's purposes but also conform to the goals and conventions of the institution in which it exists.

Institutional goals and conventions are sometimes clear and explicit.

For example, in large companies, the specific goals of various documents, as well as the preferred form and style, are often described in company correspondence and style manuals.

- Although the context is not always clearly delineated, it always can be worked out.
- Class work should be done within the context of the goals of the class as well as the specific assignment.
- Research reports should conform to the general goals and specific conventions of the scientific or technical community in which they are created.

Style Guides

Style guides are widely used in the professions and in organizations to achieve a uniform document look by identifying formal requirements for document appearance.

They are task-oriented documents in the sense that they provide definite instructions for preparing a document.
In style guides, instructions are generally provided for numerous document elements, including most of the following:

- Page formats (title page and sample page with headers or footers)
- Numbering systems (page, graphics, sections)
- Headings and subheadings
- Graphics elements
- Usage
- Punctuation and mechanics
- Document packaging

For many documents, it is a good idea to identify a standard of style so that you achieve consistency of style.

Consistency is important, not only because it genuinely improves the reader's ability to understand your material, but also because it gives the reader confidence in your ability to assert control over detail.

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