Writing With Impact: Writing To Persuade
Section 2 summary

Why knowing your reader is the starting point of all great writing: lecture summary

- Empathy with your reader is the most important skill in any writer
- So the first question you need to ask when you sit down to anything is 'who will be reading this'?
- Understanding your reader's worries, aspirations and level of expertise will help you turn what you need to say into something they want to hear

Don't write for readers: lecture summary

- Don't write for readers - write for one named reader
- Keeping one person in mind when you write will make it easier to empathise with them
- For example, when writing a piece aimed at 'mom and pop' investors, I kept my dad in mind to avoid using over-specialist terms:
    - Equities > stocks and shares
    - Fixed income investments > bonds
    - Capital > your original investment

How your reader really sees you: lecture summary
- Picture your reader as someone whose attention you need to fight for
- Your competitors are Facebook, Candy Crush and the 1001 other things they'd rather read than your writing
- Stay sharp as a writer by seeing yourself through your reader's eyes - as a potential spinner, spammer and self-indulgent rambler

So what's your point exactly? Lecture summary
- Good writing isn't (just) about the words - it's about figuring out the point
- Journalists call this point 'the lede'
- The lede depends on your reader

- Don't bury your lede!
- To identify your lede, [ask yourself the following questions](#):
  - What do *I* find most interesting about the story?
  - What's unexpected about this piece?
  - What aspect of the story will affect the greatest number of readers?
  - What action does this piece prompt in the reader?
  - What's my angle?
  - What's new?

The three questions you need to ask before you even start writing: lecture summary

- Who is my reader?
  - Is English their first language?
  - What's their job title?
  - What's their level of expertise?
  - Age/sex?
  - Who is *not* my reader?

- What do I want my reader to do after reading?
  - What's my 'Big Ask' or 'call to action'?
  - What does my reader need to know to comply with my Big Ask?
  - What doesn't need to be included?

- Why should my reader care?
  - Am I providing useful information?
  - Am I solving a tangible benefit?
  - Is my Big Ask compelling?
  - What are my reader's objections?

Does your writing pass the 'so what' test? Lecture summary

- Features are the 'what' of your product or service - what it does, how it works, tech specs
- Benefits are the 'why' of your product or service - what your reader stands to gain

- To turn features into benefits, keep asking 'so what? until you land on an irresistible reason your reader should be persuaded

How readers read… Lecture summary

- While you may feel obliged to write, nobody is obliged to read
- So foreground what's most important to your reader - don't bury your lede!
- There's no such thing as a captive audience

…and what to do about it: Lecture summary

- Accept the fact that readers scan
- Help your readers scan by using:
  - Short paragraphs - one sentence only is fine
  - Meaningful subject lines for emails
  - Subheadings to break up text
  - Bullet points
- Don't bury your lede - keep the most important information up front
- Avoid warming your reader up with 'corporate throat-clearing'
- Leave out the stuff your readers don't need to know

The reason you've probably been starting in the wrong place: lecture summary

- Ditch the way you were taught to write at school (Intro, Middle, Conclusion)
- Instead, structure your writing using the inverted pyramid - put your points in descending order of importance
- Avoid opening with phrases like:
  - Three years ago
  - As you know
  - As I said in my last announcement
  - It's a pleasure to have the opportunity to talk to you today

The one word no reader can resist: lecture summary

- Make your writing personally relevant to your reader: address them as 'you'
- 'You' is every copywriter's favourite word - it's been proven over and over again to persuade readers to act!
- Using 'you' makes your writing conversational, friendly and direct
- By using 'you', you'll automatically adopt a reader-centric view of the world
- Use 'you' twice as much as you use 'we' or 'I'

Two real-life reader awareness FAILS - and how to fix them: lecture summary

- Write for the right audience - know who your real end reader is
- Remember to ask 'so what?' to get to the most interesting point for your reader
- Consider who you're writing for, what you want them to do after reading, and what's in it for them if they do

A brilliant technique to get inside your reader's head: lecture summary

- Gather intelligence on your reader by:
  - Talking to them - pick up the phone!
  - Asking them questions - create a survey
  - Reading what they're saying online (forums, Facebook, Amazon product reviews etc)
  - Imagining what their world is like
- Create an empathy map to capture how your reader sees, hears, thinks about, feels about, and talks about their world
- Identify your reader's pains (their worries and problems) and gains (what they're seeking to achieve)
- Use empathy mapping for any type of writing exercise, including
  - Brainstorming blog content
  - Crafting a sales message
  - Planning a report
  - Communicating a difficult message

Useful resources

[A manifesto for the simple scribe: my 25 commandments for journalists](#)

Journalist Tim Radford's brilliant piece of writing about writing.

[How to persuade at every level](#)

Blog post on how to help different readers scan for the information that matters most to them.

[Six ways your schoolteacher sabotaged your business writing](#)

Blog post on the things you need to unlearn if you want to win over a non-captive audience.

[The 20 most retweetable words](#)

Note which word tops the list featured in this *AdWeek* article!