

# The Proof Angel Summary of

## Writing resources: March 2014

### How rhetorical skills still have relevance today

Some things don't change. In the ancient world they knew how to hold an audience, and all properly educated people would have known the three arts of discourse: grammar, logic & rhetoric. The Romans established 5 Canons of Rhetoric, and although the Latin may not mean much to us today, it is interesting to see the parallels in the processes.

1. **Inventio** develops and refines the argument. Today **content** is king.
2. **Dispositio** organises the elements of the argument to be as persuasive as possible. We still think about the **structure** we use to present our material.
3. **Elocutio** is the way the argument is presented, using figures of speech etc. We still have to think about the **voice** we use when we write, keeping the language & style appropriate for our audience.
4. **Pronuntiatio** is delivering the message. We think about the **design** of a document.
5. **Memoria** is the process of delivering the message without notes. These days we choose our **data storage** method.

### Ideas for improving website engagement

Here is a subject that everyone with a website should review from time to time. Not all ideas are right for everyone, and there is certainly no magic formula. So a range of ploys comes in handy:



- Sandy Appleyard has 10 ideas: <http://ow.ly/vErNL>
- Writtent have 20 suggestions: <http://ow.ly/vErUT>
- Visual.ly list 11 strategies: <http://ow.ly/vEs2S>

The Proof Angel is the trading name of Sarah Perkins, freelance editor and proofreader.

## How to communicate well

Good communication is founded on the 5 Cs. This mnemonic can be very useful for planning and checking any piece of writing:

- Clear:
  - The point of the piece should be obvious.
  - Use a logic structure so your readers see what is going on at a glance.
  - Write so the reader can understand your message straight away.
- Chunked:
  - Plan ahead so that the information can be split up into appropriate paragraphs and lists.
- Concise:
  - Get straight to the point.
  - Don't repeat yourself.
  - Don't waste time on unnecessary background.
- Concrete:
  - Facts should be stated clearly.
  - Avoid jargon & waffle.
  - Avoid vagueness.
- Correct:
  - Check facts.
  - Check presentation.
  - Check the piece is complete.

## How to convince your boss to use Plain English

Some people are afraid of plain language. They think it is dumbed down, or perhaps they worry that it will make them seem less intelligent.

If you are reporting to someone with this view, it can be hard. You can find yourself writing a mass of waffle just to please them.

Try reading this post: <http://ow.ly/vEvVJ>

## *How to avoid problems when using a keyboard*

Many of us spend a long time at the keyboard these days, & most of us know that there can be an impact on our health.

If you are a little hazy on what to do to keep safe, try this post: <http://ow.ly/vEvOW>

## Some legal points for bloggers

Here is a nice summary of some important legal issues for bloggers to think about:

<http://litreactor.com/columns/blogging-and-the-law-five-issues-you-need-to-know>

## Why plain language is good for business

It used to be fashionable to use language to show off. If you used complicated words, people would be impressed because you clearly knew what you were talking about. Business letters were full of words like "heretofore" & "aforementioned". I have several old books setting out how to write these letters - they are very amusing.

Somewhere in the last 20 years, most of us have got over this. We know that people are interested in finding the answer to their problem, not finding out how clever other people are. The best way to impress people is to share our knowledge in a clear & concise way that makes it easy for them to understand.

Plain language gives us other benefits as well. This post has a nice summary:

<http://thelanguagelab.ca/posts/why-plain-language-is-good-for-business>

## How a different angle can change results

Sometimes writing is just good therapy. It is a useful means of organising your thoughts & getting things out of your system. The writing is an end in itself.

Most of the time that is not the case. We are writing to be heard by our audience, and we all know that we have a better chance of being heard if we make sure that the piece is properly constructed, well thought out, and well written.

One of the best techniques is to think about the audience. If we write in a way that they understand, using familiar language & conventions they recognise, they will find it easier to absorb what we say.

But there is something much more fundamental about our audience. ***We need to pay attention to their needs.*** You may think your message is important to your audience, but if you look at it from ***your*** angle, you may have an uphill struggle on your hands. It will be easier if you think of the user's needs.

You have a choice between:

- I need to tell you this, and
- Here is the answer to what is worrying you, and by the way...

The Norwegian Cancer Society had a website focused on the needs of the Society: raising money. When they asked their website users what was important to them, the answer was services about treatment, symptoms, and research.

The Society changed its website design to focus on those areas. The result was happier visitors, and stunning increases in donations:

<http://ow.ly/vEvr7>

This can be a difficult technique to master, but it has to be worth a try!