

10 Tips on Writing White Papers

By Roger Pynn, APR, President
*Curley & Pynn Public Relations
& Marketing Communications*

1. **Write the headline first, last and throughout your white paper.** The headline will grab the attention of readers and tell them what's in it for them. Remember to point out throughout your paper what following your advice will do for them.
2. **Format and presentation count ...** because in effect your white paper is a standalone brochure. If you aren't adept at using word processor formatting tools, seek the help of someone who is. Better yet, adopt one of the many MS Word or other program templates.
3. **Open with a challenge the reader faces and promise to provide answers.** People are looking for problem solvers and they turn to professionals in specific fields to share insights into a world the reader doesn't understand.
4. **Don't give away the farm.** The purpose of the white paper is to show them that you have expertise and knowledge and to get them to call you to put those to work for them: for a fee. Don't solve the problem. Solve their need for reassurance that there is a solution.
5. **Do a jargon mouthwash.** Your reader will not understand the knowledge of your professional field, any more than you are likely to understand the terms they might use from the worlds of rocket science, nuclear physics or crucial steps in Native American Dance. Use plain English and stay away from technical or industry-specific terms.
6. **Grammar and punctuation count.** Even though day-to-day conversation and media may lead you to conclude that we have forgotten how to use the King's English, assume that the people you are writing to are an educated audience and that they appreciate proper use of the language. Be sure to have someone check your paper for this all-important element.
7. **Make sure your writing flows.** Everyone needs an editor, so turn to someone else and ask them to be honest and offer constructive criticism. "Does this make sense to you?" "Is it easy to read?" A great way to ensure that the answer will be "yes," is to start with an outline of your topic:
 - a. The problem
 - b. Why the problem exists
 - c. Ways to solve the problem
 - d. Why you need to take action
 - e. Where you can get help
8. **Empower the reader to solve the problem.** Offer tangible solutions. While the real purpose is to get someone to engage you to help, don't let them think they can't do something themselves. Considering providing a list of resources. Direct the reader to others upon whom you have drawn for your paper ... they reinforce your judgment and give the reader a sense of value for their time spent reading your opinions.
9. **Check lists are an important tool of white papers.** Consider offering one as a tool to help the reader assess the problem. Assigning numerical values to the weight of individual problems can help them determine if they really need help.
10. **Draw strong conclusions.** Readers have invested time when they peruse your white paper. Tell them what you think they should do, what the consequences of taking an alternative course are and what the benefits are if they follow your advice.