RESPUESTA EN CLIMA Y AMBIENTE PARA LA SALUD EN LAS AMÉRICAS

A brief guide to writing for a large audience
Workshop
September 29, 2022

Angelo Attanasio
Editor for Latinoamérica21

Learning objectives

- Establish the most effective strategy to organize the ideas to be communicated.

- Use writing techniques and tools to reach a wide non-specialized audience, without losing scientific rigor.

- Elaborate an informative text based on what was learned in the workshop.

1. THE IMPORTANCE OF STORYTELLING

What is this workshop for?

To learn some techniques to:

- Organize your ideas
- Write with ease, and, above all,
- To catch the reader's attention, without losing scientific rigor.

What is the best strategy to achieve this?

Use **STORYTELLING**. That is, to tell stories.

Why? Because stories are remembered, data are not.

Every time we listen to a story, the human brain begins to secrete **oxytocin** and **dopamine**, the neurotransmitters linked to <u>pleasure</u> and <u>human attention</u>.

Here's the secret: these neurotransmitters must be excited from the **very first lines of a text**.

2. HOW TO START A TEXT IN AN ATTRACTIVE WAY

Chi ben comincia è a metà dell'opera

The best strategy to capture the reader's attention is to produce from the beginning in their brain a **cataract of questions** that need answers.

Examples:

1. "The day they were going to kill him, Santiago Nasar got up at 5.30 in the morning to wait for the ship in which the bishop was arriving".

   "Chronicle of a death foretold", *Gabriel García Márquez*

2.   "Try using your head to multiply the number 8,388,628 by two. Can you do it in a few seconds? There is a guy who can double these numbers up to 24 times in a matter of seconds. He never misses. There is another boy who can tell you the exact time at any time of the day, even when he is sleeping. There is a girl who can determine the exact measurements of an object eight meters away. There is another child who, at the age of six, drew such vivid and powerful pictures that she managed to have her own art gallery on Madison Avenue in New York. But these children couldn't even learn to tie their shoes. In fact, none of them had an IQ beyond 50."

"Brain Rules", *John Medina*

One of the reasons for the success of this book is that it captures from the first lines with this technique: **to awaken many questions.**

The texts of famous scientific journals read all over the world, such as Scientific American or Nature, have these characteristics.

3.	"Vo' Euganeo was, until a month ago, a pretty village like many in the Veneto region of northern Italy. Nestled on the slopes of volcanic hills, half an hour's drive from the city of Padua, Vo' was famous for its prosecco wine, its natural park and the nearby thermal baths. Few would have imagined that this idyllic setting would become in a few weeks one of the first epicenters of the covid-19 epidemic in Italy. Fewer still are those who could even think that Vo' Euganeo would be the scene of a "unique scientific experiment". At the beginning of February Adriano and Renato, two residents of this town of about 3,300 inhabitants, were admitted to a local hospital with pneumonia..."

["Coronavirus in Italy: the village that managed to contain the spread of the virus with a unique experiment"](#), BBC News Mundo

4.   "When we picture the beach, the movement of the waves, soccer games on the sand or the laughter of children splashing on the shore come to mind. However, we are not aware that our beaches are suffering from what is known as "coastal stress."

The deterioration of beaches affects a lot more than your vacations, *Omar Defeo & Irene Torres*, **L21**

In the 4 examples above there is a **common element**: the questions or, in other words, the **problem**, what catches the attention, is at the **beginning**.

PROBLEM
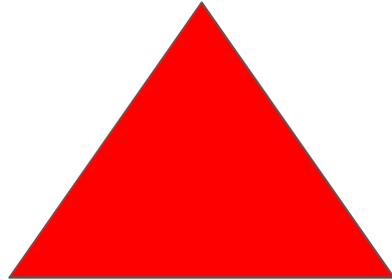
EXPLANATIONS

Difficult for academics to write:

Seek to give a broad, detailed picture, then analyze specific cases.

Best tactic for speaking to large audiences:

talk about the specific case(s) and then explain the context, evidence, results, etc. (exactly the opposite).

PARTICULAR > GENERAL

EXERCISE 1

Taking into account what we have discussed so far, write the **first paragraph** of a text in your scientific field.

Tip: try not to use clichés such as "We live in a country...", "Over the last decades...", "As everyone knows...", "Surprisingly" or other adverbs ending in -ingly, etc.

3. ORGANIZE YOUR IDEAS

Once we have the beginning, <u>how do we structure the text?</u>

Clearly, there is no recipe for guaranteed success. But there are strategies that work.

- **HOOK**
- **PROBLEM DEFINITION**
- **SUPPORTING DATA**
- **DEVELOPMENT**
- **PROPOSAL**
- **RISKS**
- **COMPARISONS**
- **CONCLUSION**

Another useful strategy is to divide the content of your texts into <u>key points</u>. In other words, create **lists**.

- It's a cognitive trick to control the mind: the brain processes more easily in chunks.
- Lists save time for the writer and the reader.
- Writing a text as a list forces us to be more concrete.

A classic example:

The Ten Commandments of Moses.

To stay within the scope of your research, take a look at these examples:
- [What is climate change: 10 fundamental terms to understand the phenomenon](#) (BBC Mundo)
- [What you need to understand the Higgs Boson in five questions](#) (Muy Interesante)
- [Ten key facts about Curiosity before its arrival on Mars](#) (ABC)

EXERCISE 2

Choose a topic you know well and try to explain it in 5 key points.

4. 10 TIPS FOR WRITING ATTRACTIVE TEXT

1. DO NOT dehumanize the text. Try to have a **human protagonist** in the stories.

2. DO NOT write long sentences. Each paragraph should contain only **one idea** (or, at most, 2). But do not write as if it were a telegram.

Example:
"This sentence has five words. Here are five other words. It's fine to write sentences like this, but too many together sound monotonous. Listen to what's going on. Reading becomes boring. The sound starts to hum. It's like a broken record. The ear begs for more variety. Now, listen. I vary sentence length and create music.. Etc.". *Gary Provost*

3. DO NOT overdo the abstractions. Try to be **as concrete as possible** using metaphors, similes, examples, comparisons.

Examples:
- In his book "A Brief History of Time", Stephen Hawkings uses the expression 'example' 62 times, the word 'like' 450 times and 105 direct questions.
- Saying "16,838 million people" does not help understanding. Saying "2 times the population of New York" does.

4. **DON'T use too many long words.** The more letters in a word, the more difficult it is to read and understand.

5. DO NOT use negative or forbidding verbs and nouns. Whenever possible, write in a **positive** form.

6. **NO to pairs** of nouns and adjectives: choose only one of the two.

7.   **DO NOT overdo it with percentages.**
Saying "66%" is equivalent to saying "2 out of 3".

8.   **DO NOT be afraid of repetitions of the subject.** On the contrary, many times this helps not to lose the thread.

9.   DO NOT use specific terminology when there are **commonly used synonyms**.
Sodium chloride, sodium chloride, NaCl > common salt.

10.   Remember: to write well, you don't have to write complicated. When you have your text, ask yourself this question: **Would my father/mother/child/friend understand it?**

5. HOW TO FINISH

Finishing a text is as complicated as starting it. You have to write **a paragraph or a sentence that holds the whole thing together like a huge column.** A text with a good closing increases quality, especially if those final lines repeat the central idea. Readers expect that conclusion. And if it doesn't come, they get angry.

If you are in difficulty, here are some basic formulas for finishing:

- <u>A famous phrase.</u> But, be careful that it is not a cliché, a saying, a commonplace.
- <u>A quote</u> from someone interviewed for this article or research.
- <u>An alert</u>, in which we warn of an imminent danger. Ex: "If we don't do it this way, then this will happen…".
- <u>The concentrated idea.</u> A definition that summarizes the meaning of the text.
- <u>Return to the beginning</u>

EXERCISE 3

Finish your text with one or maximum 2 sentences.

Referencias

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- *María Angulo Egea*, **Inmersiones. Crónica de viajes y periodismo encubierto**, Universitat de Barcelona, 2017