Quick Guide: Prepare, Prepare, Prepare!

How many of you put your fingers on the computer keys and start creating sentences when you need to write something? And then I bet you nearly always have to spend time rewriting this document. Sound familiar? Before you write, I would encourage you to do some thinking and planning. You will then be able to write your document, whether it be an email, letter or report, without as many rewrites. Here are the **top ten tips** for a structured approach to writing:

1. **Know why you are writing**. Consider if writing is the best method of communication. Then decide the purpose of the document. Think about what you want to achieve. Write a purpose sentence: 'The purpose of this document is to …' If necessary, agree the purpose with the originator if writing on behalf of somebody else.

2. **Consider your reader(s).** Are they internal or external to the firm? What are their needs? What is their knowledge and level of expertise? What is your relationship with them?

3. **Think more deeply about your reader** (s) by considering what's in it for them. Why should they bother reading it? Consider what their reaction will be to your document and how you will take this into account when writing.

4. **Jot down the points** you want to cover. Will you need examples or supporting evidence to get your points across?

5. If it is a long document, **collate all the information** you wish to include.   Decide what to include based on the purpose of the document and the reader.

6. Sort your points, or collated information, into a **logical order** for the reader. Think about the structure of the information and headings you could use to direct the reader through the document.

7. **Think about the words you will use to convey your points**. Consider the best style for what you are saying. Check the tone of your document and how it comes across.

8. **Time management is key when writing** as you want to make sure you allow enough time for planning, writing and editing, and to have some time between the writing and editing stages. Work backwards from the deadline allowing time for all the stages.

9. **Think about what you want to happen after your reader has read the document**. Have you made this clear?

10. **Now you can put your fingers on those keys!**

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Compiled by Judith Di-Castri