

Always start with the reader in mind



Photo by Kaboompics.com

It seems obvious that you should always write your marketing and communications materials with your readers in mind. After all, if you are trying to communicate with them, you have to understand what they need to know.

And yet, how many times have you received a letter that doesn't say anything? Or an email that lacks crucial information? How many times have you had to call up a company because you didn't understand something it sent you? I bet you've had many a moment like this, which left you frustrated.

Missing information

I had such a moment last week. I had signed up for an editing workshop from the American Copy Editors Society (ACES) being

given on November 5 in Washington, DC. Here's the email I received a few days before the event (note that I blocked out the names of presenters and a phone number for privacy):

This message is to confirm that you are registered for the American Copy Editors Society (ACES) Boot Camp from 9 a.m. to 5 p.m. this Saturday, Nov. 5, at George Washington University in Washington, D.C. The workshop will take place in the Fungler Hall auditorium, room 103, located on the Foggy Bottom campus.

Lunch will be provided by the local chapter of ACES.

Presenters XX, XX and XX look forward to welcoming you on Saturday.

If you have any questions or find yourself lost on Nov. 5, please feel free to call 571-xxx-xxxx for assistance.

Notice anything missing from this email? How about the address for the building? Or how about directions and parking information (or links to those)? How about an agenda and/or schedule for the day? Is there any information about what you need to bring with you?

Trying again

The next day, ACES sent another email, regarding parking information. It is basically the same email as before, except for the addition of parking and Metro information, which I bolded for you to see more clearly.

We look forward to seeing you at the American Copy Editors Society (ACES) Boot Camp from 9 a.m. to 5 p.m. tomorrow at George Washington University in Washington, D.C. The workshop will take place in the Fungler Hall auditorium, room 103, located on the Foggy Bottom campus.

Lunch will be provided by the local chapter of ACES.

Parking

The closest garage to Fungler Hall is the University Parking Garage/G Street

Garage, located at 2028 G Street, NW Washington, DC 20052. There is access from both 20th Street and 21st Street between F and G Streets. The self-service garage is open 24/7, accepting MasterCard, Visa and American Express for payments (no cash). The full day rate is \$12.

The closest Metro stop is Foggy Bottom-GWU, with service on the Blue, Orange and Silver lines.

If you find yourself lost on Nov. 5, please feel free to call 571-XXX-XXXX for assistance.

This attempt was a better than the prior email, but still, no address for Fungler Hall. It's as if ACES thinks that everyone is intimately familiar with GW's Foggy Bottom Campus. For those of you who aren't in the DC area, GW's campus is a city campus. Buildings have street addresses—they are not in quads as in traditional colleges.

I looked up Fungler Hall on Google, but I forgot to note the address, and when I got to the parking garage on Saturday, I didn't know where to go. I looked it up on my phone and the address I got did not correspond to the building. I called the number on the email, but there was no response. I was able to get directions from a student I saw on the street, and I then got to the workshop several minutes late.

How helpful are you being to your reader?

If ACES had started with the reader's needs in mind when writing this email, it would have realized that providing an address and links to maps and directions would have helped recipients of this email.

It's about the 5 Ws

When you write a press release, you should think like a journalist and answer the five Ws: what, why, where, who and when. You should also answer the how. This advice is also applicable to most any communications material you create.

**If you need help creating effective communications materials,
contact me!**