

On Headings and Subheadings

Many of us will launch 2008 with good intentions for getting organized and creating systems that increase our personal and professional efficiency. Like many of you, my stack of reading material is greater than my time to read. But several months ago I created a system that enables me to quickly sift through the stack and read the important stuff rather than let it pile up. Now, when new material arrives on my desk(top), I decide in an instant what to keep and what to toss. And that decision starts with the **headings**. I know, we all do this, but it was the act of weeding that made me realize how important a heading can be and how few people know how to write a good one. So here are some tips for writing headings and subheadings in plain language that can make a difference in whether your writing gets tossed or read.

Tip #1: Write your heading as a question.

A simple heading that poses a question can draw readers further into the text. Just be sure you provide the answer early in your content. This tip works especially well with average readers.

Tip #2: Keep it simple and obvious.

A heading that gets right to the point will win more readers. Simple subheadings offer readers a break and help them decide whether to keep reading.

Tip #3: Use simple formatting.

You don't need to bold, italic, and underline your headings. Together they are overkill. Just bold. And please, do not use all caps. They slow all readers down and hamper comprehension.

Tip #4: Use a clean typeface.

Font readability is often debated among experts, but I believe, as many do, that the best typeface for text is serif, such as Times New Roman. For headings, the best is sans serif, such as Arial.

Tip #5: Use headings and subheadings to help you organize information.

If you want to reach a wider audience, chunk information by using short subheadings that tell the reader what comes next.

The next time you sort through your piles of reading material, notice how much weight headings and subheadings carry in your decision to read or toss. Then the next time you sit down to write, use these simple tips to grab and hold your readers' attention. And, if you want to really get organized, I recommend you read David Allen's book "Getting Things Done."