

Editorial Comment

Communication, says the dictionary, is the exchange of ideas, the conveyance of information. This, possibly, is an over-simplification. Have you ever taken a Journal or magazine, read an article, and said to yourself, “So what?” Or have you ever been left scratching your head, wondering what the author said, or was trying to say? Evidently, in these cases, and they have happened to us all, the author, somehow, did not communicate. Oh, we were assured that he tried but, somewhere along the line, he lost his audience. Let’s discuss communication, the transmission of the written word, and what we can do to improve it.

Dr. Eric Sanderson, of Seattle, writing in a recent issue of *Modern Medicine*, says, “People write medical articles for two valid reasons: To attract favorable attention to themselves and to make one or more points. When it becomes too difficult to find out what points the writer is trying to make, the whole thing backfires. The points are not made and the attention the author draws to himself is unfavorable.”

He goes on to mention the squid who uses little dabs of ink to attract attention and identify himself but clouds of ink to hide in obscurity. What is needed is not only the latest in new information but to have what is already known packaged in a form easily digested by everyone. The idea is to communicate the most information to the greatest number of people.

With a little planning, we can widen the appeal and increase the readability of what we write. And, strangely enough, it is actually easier to write readable material!

The first need is that our written work has a plan, a logical sequence or order, so that one idea leads to the next.

This is easily accomplished with an outline containing all of the major points of our treatise shuffled (and re-shuffled, if necessary) into the proper order, whether it be chronological, order of importance, cause and effect, or whatever.

Secondly, the terminology of the trade is fine for the initiated, but loses the neophytes and interested outsiders. To broaden appeal, it is a simple matter to define, explain and/or illustrate the meaning of the terms used. For certain, it should be a rule of thumb to avoid slang or colloquial expressions, especially without any explanation of their meaning.

It must be obvious to all readers as to which is most important and which is of lesser importance. Such emphasis is the result of the development of perspective. Unimportant details are deleted so as not to distract. The point or conclusion is not hidden in ultra-technical or super-sophisticated verbiage. So you have a vocabulary of half a million words—Big Deal! An educated man can make ANYONE understand what he is saying.

The guide for after-dinner speakers has always been “Stand up, speak up, shut up and sit down.” Brevity applies just as well to writing. Start with the title—keep it short and to the point, the impact is greater. Avoid long paragraphs—limit them to a single idea. Long, heavy blocks of type discourage readers—editors have a field day breaking them up. Keep sentences short—they read better. Use short headlines to break up groups of paragraphs into logical, readable divisions.

We have presented nothing new. Every good article we’ve ever read embodies these points. . . . But we were so engrossed in reading them that we never noticed!

Ed Berger