

IA Specialists Need to Communicate: Guide and Checklist for Expository Writing

by M. E. Kabay, PhD, CISSP-ISSMP
Associate Professor of Information Assurance
School of Business & Management
Norwich University, Northfield VT

In explaining to our information assurance (IA) graduate students why they end up writing around 100,000 words of expository writing by the time they finish our 18-month master's program, < <http://infoassurance.norwich.edu/> > we (instructors and staff) always insist on the practical value of fluent writing. Being able to respond quickly and effectively to requests from colleagues and supervisors asking for clarification of new policies or of requests for additional resources obviously makes obvious sense; in addition, being able to respond succinctly and diplomatically to angry customers (we teach our students to think of everyone depending on them as customers) can have long-term benefits to the organization and to the individual.

When we grade our students' papers, we use a *grading rubric* that includes a percentage allotted to quality of writing. The specific details are as follows:

- Target Audience, Insights and Issue identification 35%
- Analysis, Integration of Course Materials and Organization 35%
- Effective Use of Language and Grammar 20%
- Citations and Sources 10%

The section on effective of language has the following guidance for our instructors and students:

- Strong sentence and paragraph development; very few errors or just minor errors in terms of grammar and spelling: 90 - 100%
- Reasonably good sentence and paragraph development; some errors in terms of grammar and spelling: 80 - 89%
- Good faith attempt at sentence and paragraph development, but more work needed on the major rules of grammar and spelling: 70 - 79%
- Poor overall writing skills; obvious lack of editing or non-use of spell check feature: 0 - 69%

To help graduate and undergraduate students, I have collected a series of essays into a guide called "On Writing" which I hope will help them and anyone else who is interested in writing technical materials clearly and well. < <http://www.mekabay.com/methodology/writing.pdf> > The 23-page paper has the following sections:

- 1 Organizing Your Thoughts
- 2 Writing Top-Down
- 3 Invisible Writing
- 4 On Communicating Precisely
- 5 Why We Cite Sources
- 6 Reference Materials
- 7 On Having Your Papers Edited
- 8 Integrating Feedback from Your Instructors
- 9 Egoless Work

Expository Writing

- 10 Critical Thinking and Disintermediation
- 11 Resources for Improving Your Writing
- 12 Strunk & White's Rules from *The Elements of Style*

I've also been compiling the mistakes that I often encounter in essays. At the end of March 2009, I updated the "Frequently Corrected Errors" to version 6 and have put it online for anyone to download. < <http://www.mekabay.com/methodology/fce.pdf> > This 17-page document currently has 101 topics that can serve as a checklist of common errors of grammar, punctuation, usage and style. I'd be happy to have readers contribute their own recommendations for additions to the list; I always add a footnote of thanks to the text for such suggestions.

I hope that some readers will find these resources useful in the information assurance and network management jobs. In addition, I'd be grateful to readers with family or friends in schools and colleges for passing the links on to students and teachers.

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M. E. Kabay, PhD, CISSP-ISSMP < <mailto:mekabay@gmail.com> > specializes in security and operations management consulting services. CV online. < <http://www.mekabay.com/cv/> >

