

5 Ways to Figure Out What You Want to Say (Before You Start Writing)

by Kristen Fischer

Staring at a blank screen or crisp piece of unused paper? That's usually how all of my writing projects begin. Attempting to write can be daunting--even when nothing has been written yet.

Instead of searching aimlessly for what to write, however, I'm sharing some of my go-to techniques to help you get your ideas in order.

Whether you are creating your own email newsletter, an academic paper or content for your website, I hope these strategies make your writing just a bit easier. (If not, call me!)

1. **Focus on concepts.** I notice many of my clients want to get a brochure/blog post or newsletter out, but they have no idea what they want to say....they just know they should be generating some sort of useful content. Starting out? Pick the one main concept you want to convey with this particular piece of collateral. Have more? List them in bullet points. Don't worry about wordsmithing here, you're just jotting down notes. This is the biggest frustration for most people--they want to start eloquently writing without having an idea of what they want to specifically say. Use the bullet points, trust me.
2. **Use an outline.** I rarely begin writing a document with many sections from the top down. Instead, I start with that bullet list of messages I want to convey, and go from there. In the case of my **book**, I broke those down further. Even if you're working on a shorter project, it helps to have an outline. Somehow, seeing the entire project together in just a few lines of text can show you its full scope and help you determine where you might need to fill in the gaps. Again, we're just talking a few notes here--you're not even writing yet. Don't panic, you'll get there!
3. **Look back.** What does your audience know about what you're going to say? Perhaps you covered some aspect of it in a previous blog post or brochure. Maybe you're just introducing something and need some educational content. Sometimes the best way to figure out what you need to convey with your writing is to consider what the audience knows. Put yourself in the reader's shoes...that may help you come up with those bullet points and get you writing.
4. **See it.** When I'm writing **website content**, I like to imagine what it will look like on a website--even if I haven't seen the design yet. I find that picturing the layout of your content may help you determine what you want to say. If you are compiling a newsletter, you're not just writing one article--there will be different sections and each may have various messages, so you may need a few bulleted lists. Or if you're creating an annual report, it will have numerous pages. Visualize what you want. Is it a website with 10 pages or a press package with a few press releases and a catalog?
5. **Forget editing--for now.** Before you begin to think of your dream adjectives and catchy taglines, it helps to get these messaging concepts down. Yes, you may have written down a bulleted list or outline, but don't *write* until you're ready. Once you get some sort of

ideas down of what you want to say, you can start the next step and begin writing. Still overwhelmed? Focus on jotting down or typing up these ideas first...one thing at a time.

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