

6 DEVELOPING MATERIALS

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6.1 Writing for Impact

The purpose of your marketing materials is to get your audience’s attention and touch them in a way that persuades them to take action. You can make your writing more impactful by using language that is (1) focused, (2) understandable, and (3) relatable.

1. Focused. Be economical in your writing. Remember, your audience’s time is valuable, and they are impatient. Respect their time and attention by getting to the point quickly and including just enough information to deliver the message. Make every word count. Avoid introductory text, fluff, long-winded sentences, and extraneous details. Use active voice whenever you can. Use bullets, tables, or graphs to communicate complex information.

The trick to succinct and focused writing is to be clear about your main message, and include just enough text to drive that message through. That is a lot easier when you target a particular kind of landowner ([see Section 4.1: Why Choose an Audience Segment?](#)) and develop a clear message strategy based on what will be salient to that group.

Consider the following letter designed to get landowners to talk to a service forester before harvesting trees.

FIGURE 6A: AN UNFOCUSED, UNTARGETED LETTER LEAVES LANDOWNERS CONFUSED

Dear Woodland Owner,

Our state’s woods are an important natural resource, providing homes for wildlife and clean drinking water for the community, and storing carbon for the future. Your forested land is an important piece of the overall landscape and can provide you with timber income.

The Department of Natural Resources protects and manages public lands and works with you and other landowners to help conserve our state’s forests. We can connect you to the financial and technical resources you need to:

- **prepare for a timber harvest**
- **improve wildlife habitat**
- **reduce risks from forest pests**
- **protect streams and reduce sedimentation**
- **enhance ecosystem services**

Timber harvesting is a complicated process and involves many steps, including marking trees to be cut, hiring the right logger, understanding the market, and ensuring that the woods are left in good shape. Your local forester can help you make informed decisions about how to earn income from timber sales while maintaining the health and beauty of your woods.

Contact Tim, your local service forester, at 1800FORWOOD, to get more information about harvesting your woods sustainably and getting a good price for your timber. This service is offered at no cost to landowners.

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What's wrong with this letter? It's trying to do too much. It is mixing conservation and financial values, trying to build the Department of Natural Resource's brand, and offering too many service options. Sure, the landowner is supposed to call for more information, but about what exactly? Landowners need to search the text to find a reason to call Tim and, unfortunately, many of them won't take the time to do so.

Now, suppose that you targeted this outreach to Working the Land owners ([see Section 4.3: The TELE Landowner Types](#)), a generally well-informed and savvy segment that wants to maximize financial gain while preserving long-term value and ecological amenities. You and your colleagues work through the TELE process and develop the following Because Statement ([see section 5.2: The Reason to Act](#)) to express your message strategy for this communication:

Working the Land owners will talk to a forester before harvesting, because they want to maximize their income while protecting their woods.

With this level of focus and clarity, your message can be communicated with much fewer words, as captured in the postcard below.

FIGURE 6B: A TARGETED, SUCCINCT POSTCARD GETS THE JOB DONE



Thinking about a timber harvest and not sure where to start? Talk to Tim, your local service forester, for free advice on how to get a fair price for your timber and ensure your woods stay healthy and beautiful.

Call 1-800-FOR-WOOD for free, unbiased advice on harvesting timber.

The postcard text above omits things that this type of landowner already knows and gets to the point quickly. It speaks directly to Working the Land owners' motivation to get the best income while protecting their woods and not get taken advantage of. It assures the landowner that the advice you're offering is free and unbiased, which helps them feel more comfortable about approaching you.

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WRITING FOR THE WEB

Being concise is especially important when writing for the web. Your site should convey information in a way that is easy to scan. Keep it short and sweet—both paragraphs and sentences should be small chunks of information. A good rule of thumb is paragraphs of 3-4 sentences with each sentence comprising around 10-15 words.

2. Understandable. Make sure that what you are saying is written in a way that your audience can understand. Simple language signals inclusion and builds trust. On the other hand, if folks don't know what you're talking about, they won't want to talk to you. Most marketing materials should be written at about an eighth-grade reading level. You can check the readability of your materials or website using free online tools (such as readabilityformulas.com and [readability calculator](http://readabilitycalculator.com)). Most of these websites also offer suggestions for making the text simpler and more readable.

Many words and phrases that are commonly used by natural resource professionals are not understood or are misunderstood by landowners. These words also signal a condescending, top-down attitude that can intimidate or annoy your target audience. Avoid jargon and overly technical language, except in rare cases when you are speaking to an audience that wants to feel as though they are “in” with the experts—in that situation, using a few technical terms (with explanations) can help.

3. Relatable. Use language that resonates with your target audience and signals that you are talking directly to them. Not surprisingly, this is much easier when you are, indeed, talking to a specific audience segment. Then you can use language that is likely to appeal to them (even though it may be less effective for other landowner types).

Consider this text for a flier tailored to Woodland Retreat Owners.

Your woods are home to all kinds of wildlife. Join us Saturday, September 15, to see what local woodland owner Jane Wilson has done to provide homes for a variety of woodland creatures. Jane will walk us through her property, showing us the different ways she's enhanced her woods to benefit a variety of wildlife. After the walk, we will enjoy a picnic lunch from Claire's Kitchen. We will be joined by local wildlife specialists and foresters there to answer your questions. Call 555-555-5555 to reserve your spot today.

This message uses words like woodland creatures and woods to relate to Woodland Retreat Owners. Instead of talking about management practices, it talks about the “ways” that Jane cares for her land. The event itself—a walk in the woods with a local landowner, followed by a picnic lunch—is likely to appeal to folks who enjoy being in the woods but who may feel bored or intimidated by a lecture about creating early successional habitat.

Good writing communicates the main points of your message in the clearest, most compelling terms, and in a style suited to your audience. All the words in your communication materials should be carefully considered. They should either contribute to landowners' motivation to act or increase their ability to do so.