

Long Paragraphs: The Scourge of Tired Eyes

If you've been following this 4-part series on writing more clearly, you'll understand this quote and why I chose it:

"I believe more in the scissors than I do in the pencil."

Truman Capote, an American author, wrote that before the commonplace use of computers for writing. (If he wrote it today, it would be more like, "I believe more in the Backspace key than I do in the Space key." But somehow, that just doesn't have the original quote's elegance.)

This month's issue – Part 3 in the series – is about writing more clearly with shorter paragraphs. (To view previous issues, please see the [Monthly Makeover archive](#).)

Most of us have been told at some point that in writing, short paragraphs are best. But we all need to be reminded from time to time. Especially whoever wrote this month's "Before" paragraph. (To see it, scroll down.)

Tips for Writing Shorter Paragraphs

- Keep paragraphs no longer than three or four sentences.
- Start a new paragraph when you introduce a new concept or idea.
- Use bullets to organize lists, and use numbered lists for steps.
- Use subheads to separate paragraphs:
 - Subheads introduce more white space into the document, which is easier on the eyes.
 - Subheads alert the reader to a new concept or idea.
 - Subheads make it easier for the "skimmer reader" to absorb your message.
 - If you take the time to make the subhead enticing, you'll encourage the reader to keep reading.

Using some of these tips, I rewrote a chunk o' text I found on the Internet:

BEFORE	AFTER
<p>An organization's business processes are the foundation of its success. Many companies struggle with the intricacies and inefficiencies of process integration and management; this often results in higher costs and loss of productivity. Our company helps you get your processes under control. Our expertise in business process management helps companies understand and improve their processes. This streamlining effect saves the organization time and money through better efficiency, productivity and control. And these improvements aren't just limited to individual departments. The solutions we design incorporate all aspects of the business into a unified solution that yields value to the entire organization. The result: management now has access to information and tools so they can respond to evolving conditions in real-time.</p>	<p>An organization's business processes are the foundation of its success. If your company struggles with inefficiencies in process integration and management, you'll also deal with production loss and higher costs.</p> <p>We Can Help With our business process expertise, you'll:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none">• Understand and improve your processes.• Streamline your organization.• Save time and money through better efficiency, productivity, and control. <p>These improvements extend beyond a single department to benefit the entire business. The result? Management now has access to real-time information and can quickly respond to changing conditions.</p>

You'll immediately notice that the "After" example is the same length as the "Before" example. That's because the additional paragraphs and bullets create more white space. Remember this rule:

More white space = Less intimidating

One more thing: The word count has been reduced from 118 in the "Before" example to 88 in the "After" example. And if you read last month's issue ([Part 2, "The Art of Writing One-Breath Sentences"](#)), you know that's a good thing!

I hope you've enjoyed this month's issue. If you have an idea for an issue or if you've noticed some particularly bad marketing writing you'd like to share, let me know about it at maryms@5starwriting.com.

Regards,



Mary

P.S. I love getting new subscribers, so if you know someone who'd enjoy this article, please pass it on to them!

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