

Don't Tell Me Your Purpose for Writing

By Dianna Booher

How many times have you read an email, letter, report, or proposal that began, “The purpose of this document is to ... blah, blah, blah...?” And the writer of the document goes on for another sentence or paragraph, promising what he or she is GOING to tell you. A purpose statement is like a prose table of contents; it merely promises to tell readers something later—if the readers keep forging ahead.

I'd prefer the writer just tell me rather than promise to tell me.

To grab your reader's attention, open with a message statement rather than a purpose statement. A message statement informs. It summarizes the key points of the entire document.

Purpose: This email is in response to your request to provide further information about the NTA convention expenses.

Message: I have reviewed the trade-show opportunities at the NTA convention May 9-11 and estimate our total exhibit and travel expenses to be approximately \$15,500.

Purpose: The purpose of this report is to outline some of our plans in the marketing efforts to be directed by John Lynover.

Message: The Model 409TZ marketing efforts to be directed by John Lynover include a direct-mail campaign, free public seminars, and a rebate coupon packaged with the product. We've outlined below

Don't just “set the stage” for your message. Pull the curtain.

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231 words

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For more on business writing, see E-Writing: 21st-Century Tools for Effective Communication (Simon & Schuster/Pocket Books) by Dianna Booher.