

# SMART Analysis

*situation-message-audience-response-tool(s)*

## Overview—getting the right details for a specific situation, audience & response

Much wasted time in communicating results from jumping into the writing process too quickly and becoming committed to details and wording that must be deleted/changed later ... often reluctantly. Allowing time up front for sharply focused, situation analysis, dramatically speeds up the process by keeping the communicator focused on the essentials from the outset and throughout the process. That analysis also significantly increases the communicator's chances of getting it right the first time or knowing what went wrong and being able to adjust quickly when the audience responds unexpectedly.

The analysis works best in two phases, both conducted under time pressure:

1. Write a tight snapshot that captures the essence of the communication task in a single statement, and
2. Create a list of pertinent message details based closer study of situation, audience, response & tools.

### Phase 1: SMART statement: overall plan (process guide)

Think of the **SMART** statement as writer/communicator's aiming device. The audience never sees it—its purpose is to keep a busy writer focused on the essentials from the outset and throughout the process, so that he/she doesn't waste time later editing irrelevant data. The order isn't important, but covering all components is:

- **Situation**— the immediate reason why this message is necessary now. *There are other influences, but leave them for fuller analysis later*
- **Message** — the essence of the message reduced to a single phrase. *The details come later—this is just the essence of the message.*
- **Audience** — the primary receiver plus a key identifying characteristic.
- **Response** — the immediate action you need from the audience now.
- **Tool(s)** — strategic choice of delivery device (email, letter, fax, memo, etc.)

The following template may help you start: —“Because of this **situation** (brief phrase about why the communication is necessary now) I will say/write (**message**) to (**audience**) to get it to (desired **response**) using (face—to-face/telephone/email / fax/ etc—**tool**.”)

#### Examples:

1. In order to meet tomorrow's 4 p.m. deadline, (*situation*), I will communicate with my friends (*audience*) by phone (*tool*) about the concert (*message*) to get them to order tickets today (*response*.)
2. I will write my boss (*audience*) using a company memo (*tool*) explaining why I should receive a raise (*message*) so that he will set up a meeting with me to discuss the raise (*response*) because my responsibilities have increased significantly over the past 3 months (*situation*).
3. I am contacting Telus Customer Service (*audience*) about a serious billing problem (*message*) by registered letter and a follow-up phone call (*tool*) in order to get Telus to refund the \$45 charged in error (*response*) because I need the money by the end of the month (*situation*.)

#### Flexible reference point for the entire process:

*Adjust the statement repeatedly* as a closer examination of audience & situation starts to impact your thinking about the response you need, your choice of tool(s), and the amount and quality of message detail you will need to get that response under these circumstances. In fact, keep all your revisions handy until you complete the process—keep a record of the changes in your thought process.

Now it's time to generate the message details in point form—the hard data that your audience will need in order to respond appropriately.

## Phase 2—Interactive Analysis

Some details will be immediately obvious, but others don't appear until you examine audience & situation more closely.

**Suggestion:** Divide a page in half something like the illustration to the right. As you begin to list the details you think should be included in the message (based on your **SMART** statement,) think about the questions below in terms of what is likely to affect your audience's ability to understand and act as you want it to. Record new audience, tool, response & situation details so that you don't lose sight of them (they will likely trigger other information considerations). Occasionally, rethink the response you need in terms of whether it is realistic or even preferred (in light of new audience/message/situation details), and jot down secondary responses as they occur to you.

**Dynamic Relationship:** What rapidly becomes apparent, is that these elements are *dynamically* linked: adjust one and the others have to adjust as well...whether you are aware of that linkage or not! Doing the analysis up front alerts you to that linkage, and gives you an opportunity to take advantage of it throughout the writing process.

**Time Saving Approach:** Determining precisely what you need to say, how and why *before you commit any time to actually writing the document*, dramatically reduces drafting and editing time later. The initial analysis speeds up significantly with practice—typically writing time drops to 25% overall in a relatively short time depending upon your motivation & intensity.

### **Situation— anything that might influence audience response**

- ▶ What is the immediate reason why this message must be delivered to this audience now?
- ▶ Is this message independent or the beginning, middle or end of a longer process?
- ▶ Is the audience expecting to hear from me, or will this contact & information comes as a surprise?
- ▶ What is my relationship to this audience—first contact or established association; familiarity; trust?
- ▶ How formal/informal is the situation?
- ▶ Do I have any competition—past, present, future?

### **Message — precise details to get the job done & appropriate vehicle**

- ▶ What kinds of information (amounts, dates, times, etc.) will this audience need/want?
- ▶ What explanations will help audience understanding?
- ▶ What kinds of details would best be presented as graphics—figures or tables?
- ▶ What precautions in wording will be important given this audience and situation?

### **Audience — primary & secondary**

- ▶ Who is my primary audience? Who else is likely to see this message, now or later? Consequences?
- ▶ How will my audience benefit from this message? How can I make this benefit clear in the message?
- ▶ What does my audience already know about this information? Need to know? Want to know? How technical/specialized?

### **Response — immediate, midrange & long-term**

- ▶ What do I want my audience to do/think immediately after receiving this document?
- ▶ Why is this message needed? Now? Are deadlines involved? Have I specified them?
- ▶ How do I want the audience to respond over the next few months? Next few years?

### **Tool(s)**

- ▶ Given the situation, audience and type /volume of information to be transmitted, what is the best tool or combination for this information: *in person, telephone, fax, email, letter, memo, etc.?*
- ▶ What effect will my choice of tool(s) have on audience understanding & response?

| <b>SMART Grid</b> |  |
|-------------------|--|
| <b>Situation</b>  | <b>Message</b>   |
| --                | <i>Not the precise details themselves, but the types of information you will need to convince this audience to respond as you want it to</i> |
| --                |  |
| --                |  |
| --                |  |
| --                |  |
| <b>Audience</b>   | --   |
| --                | --   |
| --                | --   |
| <b>Response</b>   | --   |
| --                | --   |
| --                | --   |
| <b>Tool(s)</b>    | --   |
| --                | --   |
| --                | --   |