

12. Presentation of Information

Good writing – business or otherwise - has rhythm, interest and an economy of words. Words flow from paragraph to paragraph. The content is interesting and the writing is concise.

12.1 Style and Tone

The style and tone you use, formal or informal, is dependent on the expectations of your audience.

12.2 Presenting figures

Charts and graphics are a good way of conveying information and are generally easier on the eye than columns of figures. Give each item a number.

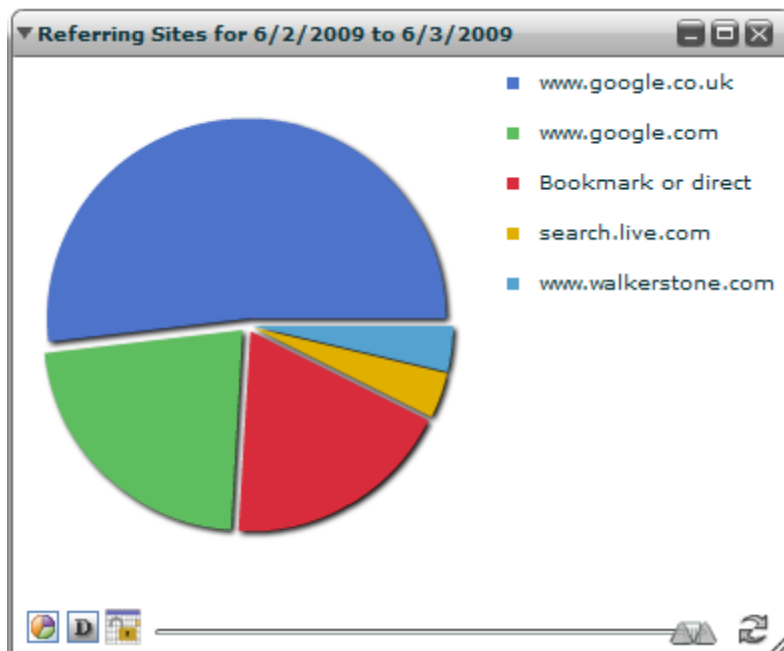


Figure 1

12.3 Action captions

Whenever you wish to make a particular point with graphics, drawings, photographs and charts, endeavour to use action captions wherever it is appropriate. Their purpose is to simplify meaning for the reader and make your report easier to understand.

Action captions are always read and are an effective means of getting a particular point across to your reader. If your report communicates your ideas better than competing ideas, then you have a competitive advantage.

A. Why use action captions?

It enables you to interpret a visual on behalf of the reader and explain the benefits to the reader. The alternative is for readers to draw their own conclusion.

Given that readers, evaluators or buyers read many reports, action captions enable your proposal to be different. They enable you to offer clear interpretation. You could for instance refer to supporting statistics derived from a respected market research group. Whatever the graphic, action captions offer you the opportunity to increase the credibility of your proposal.

As to the length of an action caption, they should be as short as possible but long enough to make the point effectively. If you have to write four sentences rather than one, so be it. It is far better that that it is the case than for the reader to have to delve into the body copy to find meaning.

Try not to repeat phrases which are in the main copy. Use different words and phrases for your captions wherever possible.

B. Reference your captions

Captions should have three components: figure number, title and graphic.



Numbers are used to reference the image within the copy. At each numbered or lettered section, reference the section number first and then the caption number. For example, Figure 5.1. This means section five, figure one.

However, when constructing the proposal, detailed section numbers are helpful for co-ordinating content from several writers. After the draft proposal is completed, revert back simplified section numbering. Refer to all graphics as figures, unless of course, this method contravenes your company style guide.

C. Use meaningful titles

Labels and captions need to make points clearly and give the appropriate message. If you need to emphasise that your team has banking administration experience, instead of labelling your chart "Organisation chart" it would be better to write: "Organisation chart: Our team is headed by our programme manager who has a senior banking administration background. She is supported by five highly experienced banking administrators."

If you wish to show an image in support of your report or proposal, do not state the obvious and write “window” and leave it the readers to draw their own conclusions. Give the image an informative title and caption that supports the points you wish to make.

Inadequate	Informative
 <p data-bbox="293 685 539 719">Figure 1. Window</p>	 <p data-bbox="847 685 1225 842">Figure 1.1 Twenty new sash windows have been installed to match the type and style of existing window frames.</p>

D. Link features to benefits

Lead with a benefit to show customer focus. Then you should make the features support how the benefit is delivered. It is important that the link is clear. If you cannot see the benefit, then you should consider removing the caption. Leaving it in, may lead to reader distraction and message ambiguity.

When planning your report or proposal, it is useful to draft a series of action captions. Label them by section, heading and paragraph number. If there are multiple writers of your proposal, at the time of the final draft, it is easier to insert graphics and captions as appropriate

To ensure that they correctly summarise your document, print them and place them in their correct sequence to see if they tell your message by themselves. It is important that they do. If they do not, better explanation may be needed. If you are using graphics used from a previous report or proposal, ensure that they are absolutely appropriate to your current proposal.

E. Support benefits with facts and figures

Credibility is built on facts and figures. Wherever possible support your benefits with quantified, substantiated and relevant qualification. However, it is better to state an unqualified benefit than to have no benefit stated at all.