

Transcript | Turning Your Writing from Bland to Brilliant

WEBVTT

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00:00:18.050 --> 00:00:35.589

Alice Sinclair: Great. Hi! Welcome to this masterclass writing event, Turning Your Writing from bland to Brilliant. My name is Alice, and I'm a communications manager here at Apolitical. It would be great to hear from all of you too, so please do post in the chat where you're joining us from, and what organization you work for.

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00:00:35.680 --> 00:00:43.519

Alice Sinclair: Today is all about learning practical techniques for improving structure, flow, and visual layout, helping you cut through the noise and get noticed.

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00:00:43.520 --> 00:01:05.549

Alice Sinclair: You'll hear from expert communicators on how to bring clarity, energy, and personality into your writing, and how to format documents so they're not just read, but remembered. For those of you who may be joining us for the first time, welcome! Apolitical is the world's largest community for government used by over a quarter of a million public servants and policy makers from more than 170 countries.

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00:01:05.600 --> 00:01:19.970

Alice Sinclair: Our mission is to make governments smarter, and we do this by putting the best knowledge and skills at the fingertips of public servants around the world. And I'm just going to hop into the chat and read some intros from here.

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00:01:20.090 --> 00:01:33.450

Alice Sinclair: So we've got Polly joining from South London. Hi, Polly. And we have Keith from Ottawa in Canada. Hi! Welcome. And we have, we have Greg from Surrey County Council.

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00:01:33.450 --> 00:01:41.309

Alice Sinclair: And Dave from Halifax in Nova Scotia. Thank you very much, and welcome to you all.

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00:01:41.310 --> 00:01:48.100

Alice Sinclair: Before we get started, I also want to introduce you to the Writing Effectively in Government community on Apolitical.

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00:01:48.120 --> 00:02:06.890

Alice Sinclair: It's a space to ask the questions we don't always get time for at work, such as, how do others manage tight deadlines? What's a good structure for a persuasive memo? How do I know when to stop editing? If you've ever wondered these things, you're definitely not alone, and this community is a great place to connect with and learn from your peers in the public sector.

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00:02:08.150 --> 00:02:24.129

Alice Sinclair: You can scan the QR code, which is on screen now, to go to the community, or you'll find the link in the resources section, which can be found at the bottom of your Zoom screen. My colleague will post it in the chat as well. So I'll just get a few technical notes out of the way before we get into today's conversation.

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00:02:24.130 --> 00:02:38.920

Alice Sinclair: This event is recorded for on-demand viewing on the Apolitical website. Please don't record it yourself. Contact details for privacy concerns are in the apolitical homepage footer. Closed captions are available and can be toggled off in your screen settings.

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00:02:39.090 --> 00:02:48.169

Alice Sinclair: Great. Now, before we introduce our speakers, we're going to run a few quick polls, just to get a sense of where you're all coming from into today's discussion.

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00:02:48.410 --> 00:02:50.899

Alice Sinclair: Right, so we'll have a look at the first poll.

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00:02:51.150 --> 00:02:57.899

Alice Sinclair: What is the biggest reason your writing might go unread? So we've got too long.

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00:02:58.050 --> 00:03:01.130

Alice Sinclair: Too dense, Not engaging.

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00:03:01.310 --> 00:03:07.190

Alice Sinclair: poor formatting, or wrong tone. And I'm just gonna give you a...

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00:03:08.140 --> 00:03:12.620

Alice Sinclair: Couple of seconds here to let some more people answer.

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00:03:15.000 --> 00:03:21.800

Alice Sinclair: This is great. I'm seeing not engaging is ahead at the moment, with 34%.

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00:03:22.970 --> 00:03:27.030

Alice Sinclair: And too long at 30%.

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00:03:27.030 --> 00:03:28.400

Benita Adesuyan: engaging.

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00:03:30.220 --> 00:03:31.600

Alice Sinclair: That's great!

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00:03:32.130 --> 00:03:39.830

Alice Sinclair: And then the, second, The second poll we've got, which will come up just

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00:03:39.950 --> 00:03:45.680

Alice Sinclair: In a second will be, which type of document do you find hardest to write?

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00:03:45.830 --> 00:03:49.300

Alice Sinclair: So, you've got briefing note, email to leadership.

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00:03:49.370 --> 00:04:05.849

Alice Sinclair: internal update, report, policy paper, external cons, or something else. In which case, please do share in the chat if you have any, if you have anything else that you want to share in the chat, and then we can all see what you're saying. Again, I'll just give you a few

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00:04:06.110 --> 00:04:08.560

Alice Sinclair: More seconds to answer these.

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00:04:11.000 --> 00:04:24.480

Alice Sinclair: And again, what have we got? What's ahead? I can see briefing note is up there. Policy paper, that's unsurprising. Policy paper is there with 26% as one of the hardest. And briefing note, just behind, with 23%.

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00:04:25.990 --> 00:04:27.260

Alice Sinclair: That's great.

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00:04:28.070 --> 00:04:30.069

Alice Sinclair: Thank you very much for...

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00:04:30.120 --> 00:04:40.739

Alice Sinclair: answering those polls. Now, I am going to introduce our speakers. We are fortunate to have two brilliant guests with us today, Mark Morris and Benita Adesuyan.

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00:04:40.740 --> 00:04:58.120

Alice Sinclair: Mark Morris has been a speechwriter for senior leaders for 18 years, including a decade with the NATO Secretary-General, when he won a Cicero Award for his speech to the US Congress. He previously wrote for UK health secretaries and other ministers, and has taught over 100,000 writers in person and online.

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00:04:58.600 --> 00:05:17.919

Alice Sinclair: Benita Edasuyan is a communications and PR specialist with over 10 years' experience working in the UK, UAE, and Cayman Islands, where she now resides. CIPR qualified and published internationally, she has helped leaders and organizations in and outside the government connect with audiences and craft compelling stories.

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00:05:18.020 --> 00:05:26.910

Alice Sinclair: You can read their full bios by visiting the Resources tab at the bottom of your Zoom screen and heading to the Speakers section. Welcome to both of you, it's lovely to have you here.

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00:05:27.250 --> 00:05:30.359

Alice Sinclair: Okay, let's start with an icebreaker to kick things off.

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00:05:30.530 --> 00:05:49.239

Alice Sinclair: Each of you will have 30 seconds to share your responses, and we'd love to hear the answers of everyone here today in the chat as well. So, what is a word or a phrase you would ban from all public sector writing, if you could? And just whilst you think on your answers, I will also invite our audience to share their examples in the chat.

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00:05:49.270 --> 00:05:53.269

Alice Sinclair: Okay, Mark, you've got 30 seconds to give us your answer.

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00:05:53.490 --> 00:06:00.459

Mark Morris: 30 seconds just isn't enough, I've got, I've got hundreds of them. I think I'm gonna go for...

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00:06:01.040 --> 00:06:02.400

Mark Morris: Something that...

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00:06:02.470 --> 00:06:20.850

Mark Morris: I hear all the time, I've heard it throughout my whole career, it's, we need to think outside of the box. Because it's the most boring, hackneyed, uncreative way of encouraging creative thought. It goes against what it's trying to achieve.

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00:06:20.850 --> 00:06:28.429

Mark Morris: And I think that, that sort of deep irony would do it for me. So, no more thinking outside of the box, just be creative.

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00:06:28.430 --> 00:06:41.329

Mark Morris: Come up with something new and fresh, and invigorating and exciting. thinking... and also, thinking inside box, inside constraints can be, like, you know, necessity is the mother of invention.

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00:06:41.330 --> 00:06:50.110

Mark Morris: It can force creativity. So, if anything, think inside the box. A really, really tall, constrained box, that will force creativity.

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00:06:50.920 --> 00:06:56.460

Alice Sinclair: Okay, yep, I have to agree with you there, Mark, that's a great one. Now, Benita, can I hand over to you for yours?

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00:06:56.800 --> 00:07:13.920

Benita Adesuyan: Yeah, Alice, you know what? I absolutely love this question, because I was thinking about it, and there are so many terms I think we either overuse or kind of lean into a little too much. In fact, even lean in is one of the ones that we need to be careful of. But for me, I chose...

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00:07:14.060 --> 00:07:16.559

Benita Adesuyan: Strategic priorities.

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00:07:16.590 --> 00:07:24.360

Benita Adesuyan: Why? Because if it's a priority, it is going to be strategic. So, I think we sometimes just...

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00:07:24.380 --> 00:07:41.119

Benita Adesuyan: overuse these terms, as Mark said, and we just rest on them too way, way, way, way too much. So, I think, yeah, strategic priorities. Other ones, I asked some of my colleagues this question as well. Other ones that, came up were things like

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00:07:41.630 --> 00:07:43.280

Benita Adesuyan: Low-hanging fruit.

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00:07:44.920 --> 00:07:46.869

Alice Sinclair: Yes, I agree.

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00:07:46.870 --> 00:07:47.340

Benita Adesuyan: You know...

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00:07:47.540 --> 00:08:01.450

Alice Sinclair: Yeah, those are brilliant, thank you both. And actually, I'm just going to pop into the chat, because we've got some great ones coming in from our audience as well. Melissa has the classic synergies. Yep. Fran has optionality.

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00:08:01.650 --> 00:08:05.660

Alice Sinclair: And then we have Holistic from Jennifer.

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00:08:06.050 --> 00:08:14.519

Alice Sinclair: And yes, we have Lean In from Laura. There's a classic one. Thanks all so much for contributing, that is great.

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00:08:14.520 --> 00:08:26.470

Mark Morris: I do also think that if you add the word strategic or strategy to your job title, though, you can increase your salary significantly without actually doing anything different. So that's... that's a good way of using strategy.

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00:08:26.590 --> 00:08:29.320

Alice Sinclair: Okay, well, that's a career tip, right there, that's free.

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00:08:30.900 --> 00:08:46.610

Alice Sinclair: Right, now we can get stuck into things. Mark and Benita have both prepared a masterclass, drawing on some of their hard-earned writing lessons and hacks. As always, we'll leave plenty of time for you in the audience to ask questions after, so please start thinking about those, and posting them in the chat as we go.

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00:08:46.610 --> 00:08:56.839

Alice Sinclair: First, though, Mark, if you're ready, we will start with you, and you have 15 minutes, and I'll give you a little nudge towards the end, so you'll know how long you've got left.

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00:08:57.130 --> 00:09:21.949

Mark Morris: That would be very helpful. I can be a bit chatty. Hello everyone, really glad to be, addressing you all today. I just... I wish I could see you and hear you, but, you know, online is... we'll have to do today. What I want to start with is a little bit about my own story. Alice was very kind, and she sort of explained a little bit how, for 18 years, I was a speechwriter

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00:09:21.950 --> 00:09:23.600

Mark Morris: first in the UK government.

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00:09:24.040 --> 00:09:36.919

Mark Morris: And then for, 10 years at NATO, working for the, the Secretary General and the Deputy Secretary General there. I had the most extraordinary career. I loved my job.

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00:09:38.140 --> 00:09:50.429

Mark Morris: But I... and I found myself in this position of, you know, everyone thinking, oh, you're a fantastic writer, you must be, you know, just born with this innate talent to write beautiful sentences.

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00:09:51.090 --> 00:09:53.660

Mark Morris: Nothing could be further from the truth.

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00:09:54.520 --> 00:10:15.199

Mark Morris: I've made a really successful career as a professional writer by not... but not by being a naturally great writer. In fact, naturally, I was really very mediocre indeed. I got a C at GCSE when I was 16. I didn't do English A level, I didn't do an English degree.

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00:10:15.370 --> 00:10:26.529

Mark Morris: it was only until I was in my, sort of, late 20s, like a proper, fully grown adult, in the civil service in the UK, sort of

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00:10:26.530 --> 00:10:35.160

Mark Morris: Doddering along, not doing anything particularly interesting, you know, very interesting jobs, but in terms of my career, it wasn't exactly setting the world on fire.

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00:10:35.160 --> 00:10:47.850

Mark Morris: When we had one of those situations where there was a bit of budget at the end of the year for training, and so we all had to go on a training course. And I went on a two-day residential writing course.

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00:10:48.360 --> 00:11:00.979

Mark Morris: And there's no exaggeration to say that that course changed my life. Because, you know when you go on a course, and a week afterwards, you... you kind of forget that you even went on it? Well.

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00:11:01.070 --> 00:11:14.789

Mark Morris: not for the... not for me, not for this one. Something inside me clicked, and I became obsessed. And all of the things that they taught and told me to do, I really took it to heart.

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00:11:15.300 --> 00:11:32.169

Mark Morris: And I went... I remember there was a piece I'd just written on our intranet. I was in the Department for International Development at the time. And I was quite pleased with it. You know, it was out there, it was a good piece of work. I thought it was a good piece of work. And then I did this course, and I realized, oh no!

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00:11:32.450 --> 00:11:34.240

Mark Morris: It's terrible!

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00:11:34.580 --> 00:11:37.940

Mark Morris: So I came back and rewrote it.

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00:11:38.510 --> 00:11:51.139

Mark Morris: Entirely. Put it up there, and it went from being read by almost nobody to the single most read, article on our intranet site within a week. And that...

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00:11:51.150 --> 00:12:03.070

Mark Morris: really sealed the deal for me. And soon I became... I got a bit of a reputation for being a writer, then some speeches came my way, and I became the guy that writes the speeches.

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00:12:03.710 --> 00:12:11.579

Mark Morris: and literally my career changed. My life changed. So this isn't something that...

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00:12:11.580 --> 00:12:28.129

Mark Morris: people are born to do. This is something that I learned. This is something that you can learn. So, I think, first off, I want to get that idea across, that this is something that everyone can improve, everyone can be much better at.

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00:12:28.930 --> 00:12:48.500

Mark Morris: The other reason why, I... so I love helping other people, that's, that's, other people to improve their writing. I've done that a lot. I also do it particularly for people in the public sector, in the civil service, because fundamentally, it's important for our democracy.

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00:12:48.750 --> 00:12:52.610

Mark Morris: And that sounds a bit grand, but I truly believe it.

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00:12:52.950 --> 00:13:12.570

Mark Morris: So often, politicians aren't trusted, governments aren't trusted, and a big part of that is the language that we use. Words that are so long and complicated and impenetrable and abstract that people just don't listen, or when they do listen, they can't quite understand.

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00:13:12.650 --> 00:13:15.840

Mark Morris: And it sounds like we're hiding something.

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00:13:16.190 --> 00:13:26.210

Mark Morris: It really... bad writing is untrustworthy for the general public, and that's really, really bad for democracy, because then you allow other people to come along.

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00:13:26.470 --> 00:13:41.299

Mark Morris: As we're seeing around the world, and say that, you know, these are, these are bad guys. We've got the answers, more extreme, more radical, often quite dangerous. So, I think...

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00:13:41.470 --> 00:13:46.170

Mark Morris: Fundamentally, writing is core to our democracy.

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00:13:46.690 --> 00:13:55.210

Mark Morris: Right, enough of my hobby horse. I'm gonna get on with the presentation. So, here we go. Share my screen.

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00:13:55.860 --> 00:13:57.220

Mark Morris: Here we are.

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00:13:58.900 --> 00:14:00.540

Mark Morris: And...

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00:14:03.730 --> 00:14:05.270

Mark Morris: Right, can you all see that?

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00:14:07.030 --> 00:14:17.550

Mark Morris: Brilliant, thumbs up from Alice. Okay, so, from brand to brilliant. I want to talk about a bit of evidence of the importance of this. Christopher Trudeau's a lawyer in Michigan.

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00:14:17.870 --> 00:14:31.129

Mark Morris: And, he's also, obsessed with clear writing. And in law, oh my word, legal documents are terrible. We all know this. Anyone who's ever tried to read anything, it's a struggle.

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00:14:31.160 --> 00:14:45.560

Mark Morris: he asked lots of law firms in Michigan to... and lots of clients, and he came up with some really obvious things. Most people prefer documents written in plain English. Well, of course they do.

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00:14:45.910 --> 00:14:52.250

Mark Morris: 99.7 thought it was important to understand what their attorney was talking about.

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00:14:52.890 --> 00:15:04.350

Mark Morris: My question is, what about the 0.3%? What's going on there? 79% had received a document that they found difficult to understand. I'm surprised it's not higher.

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00:15:04.810 --> 00:15:15.039

Mark Morris: half, almost, had stopped reading an important legal document because they found it difficult to read. That's worrying. And there are other things, like...

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00:15:15.160 --> 00:15:33.649

Mark Morris: 97% of people preferred the phrase, among other things, rather than inter-alia. It's all this showing off, you know, oh, look, when people write, quite often they're trying to show off. So, oh, look at how clever I am. All people do then is make their reader feel stupid. If you don't know what interalia meant.

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00:15:33.650 --> 00:15:36.450

Mark Morris: And I like to look it up, then...

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00:15:36.450 --> 00:15:42.149

Mark Morris: You're not... you're not buying into the document, you're wasting your reader's time.

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00:15:42.840 --> 00:15:58.149

Mark Morris: But he also found something really surprising, something that he didn't expect, which is the more educated the person, the more specialist their knowledge, the greater was their preference for documents written in clear English.

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00:15:58.560 --> 00:16:05.050

Mark Morris: So here, people with a bachelor's degree had a greater preference than those without one.

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00:16:05.200 --> 00:16:20.159

Mark Morris: a master's or doctor's, doctoral degree in an even greater preference, and the most... the people who preferred it most of all were people with a juris Doctor. That's an American legal qualification. These are the very lawyers

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00:16:20.160 --> 00:16:38.720

Mark Morris: who are writing these impenetrable, terrible documents in the first place. It's ridiculous. Now, his research didn't go into why they had the preference, but from my experience of working with ministers and people at the top of different organizations, it's obvious.

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00:16:38.950 --> 00:16:57.820

Mark Morris: I think it's because the more educated you are, the more specialist you are, the more senior you are within a department, within an organization, the more you have to read, and the less time you have in which to read it. Basically, you don't want faff.

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00:16:57.900 --> 00:17:16.109

Mark Morris: You don't want, padding, you just want people to get to the point as clearly and succinctly as possible. You might be able to understand all the jargon and technical stuff in the world, but it just makes it more difficult to get to the point, to get to what you want from that document.

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00:17:17.250 --> 00:17:26.499

Mark Morris: So, when you're writing, there are 3 areas that I think you need to look at before you write a single word.

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00:17:26.650 --> 00:17:29.720

Mark Morris: The first one is your objective.

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00:17:29.830 --> 00:17:46.660

Mark Morris: what's the point? What are you trying to achieve? Not just, oh, well, I need to reply... write a report, or I need to write a briefing, but the outcome. What do you... what is that report trying to achieve? What... how do you want the world to change in some way, small or large.

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00:17:47.590 --> 00:17:52.159

Mark Morris: That's what you have to have clear in your mind before you start.

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00:17:52.430 --> 00:17:56.830

Mark Morris: a good way to approach this is the smart,

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00:17:56.830 --> 00:18:14.859

Mark Morris: criteria, specific, measurable, assigned to someone, realistic and time-bound. This is, a good framework just to go through in your head. Like, if you can answer all those questions, that can really, really help. But if you don't know what your objective is.

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00:18:14.930 --> 00:18:19.860

Mark Morris: Before you start writing, I can guarantee you'll never achieve it.

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00:18:20.140 --> 00:18:24.940

Mark Morris: So always think clearly about your objective. Next one is, who is your reader?

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00:18:25.450 --> 00:18:32.060

Mark Morris: Now, imagine a scene. You've got two doctors, and they are having a conversation about a patient.

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00:18:32.510 --> 00:18:44.119

Mark Morris: And I know that if I listened in on their conversation, I wouldn't be able to understand anything. Well, not half, anyway, of what they were talking about.

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00:18:44.120 --> 00:18:52.809

Mark Morris: I don't have their shared experience. I don't have their shared education. I'm not a doctor. I'm not medically qualified to do anything.

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00:18:53.380 --> 00:18:57.880

Mark Morris: But that's okay, because for them, they're an audience of one.

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00:18:58.030 --> 00:19:15.459

Mark Morris: They know each other well, they probably work together all the time, they do have that shared experience, that shared education, that shared vocabulary. So for them, their words are not a barrier, they're a bridge to communication. It's an effective shorthand

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00:19:15.470 --> 00:19:18.400

Mark Morris: To communication, and that's fine.

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00:19:19.170 --> 00:19:34.860

Mark Morris: Problem comes when those doctors turn around and use that same language to the patient, or to the patient's family. And in an instant, it's gone from that bridge to an impenetrable barrier.

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00:19:35.420 --> 00:19:46.729

Mark Morris: And that's the problem with an awful lot of writing. We write for ourselves, we write for our knowledge, what we know, and we forget that we're not the reader.

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00:19:46.850 --> 00:19:48.379

Mark Morris: And the reader

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00:19:48.890 --> 00:20:10.239

Mark Morris: is the most important person. You have to respect your reader. You have to understand that they might not know the same things that you do. They might not understand

these technical terms, these acronyms. They might not have... if you're talking to the general public, they might not have a particularly high level of literacy.

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00:20:10.380 --> 00:20:13.370

Mark Morris: They might not understand what certain words mean.

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00:20:13.540 --> 00:20:15.300

Mark Morris: You have to be.

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00:20:15.820 --> 00:20:20.290

Mark Morris: Focus entirely on who is going to be your reader.

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00:20:21.360 --> 00:20:28.030

Mark Morris: and write for them. It has to be you doing the hard work, and never your reader.

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00:20:28.590 --> 00:20:44.410

Mark Morris: Because if you do make your reader do all the hard work, quite often, they'll, like 44% of those people in the research before, they'll just stop reading. And then, no matter how much work you've put into that document.

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00:20:44.690 --> 00:20:46.169

Mark Morris: It's all been wasted.

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00:20:47.010 --> 00:20:51.410

Mark Morris: So respect your reader, you do the hard work, not them.

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00:20:51.560 --> 00:20:56.810

Mark Morris: The third question is, what is your voice? Who are you representing? Is it just you?

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00:20:56.970 --> 00:21:09.019

Mark Morris: is it someone else? Are you writing something on behalf of your boss? Or, for me, as a speechwriter, I would never write a speech as myself. I would always write it as Jens Stoltenberg, Secretary General for NATO, or,

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00:21:09.320 --> 00:21:11.449

Mark Morris: Jeremy Hunt, Secretary of State for Health.

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00:21:12.540 --> 00:21:18.409

Mark Morris: get their voice in your head. Or are you representing the organization? In which case.

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00:21:19.050 --> 00:21:22.490

Mark Morris: Does the organization have a particular style?

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00:21:22.920 --> 00:21:31.699

Mark Morris: These are the questions. What is your objective? What is your reader? Who's your reader? And what is your voice? Crucial to think about before you start writing.

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00:21:32.050 --> 00:21:33.820

Mark Morris: Now, when you are writing.

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00:21:34.200 --> 00:21:42.919

Mark Morris: There are many, many ways of, improving your individual words and sentences and paragraphs and the whole document.

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00:21:43.630 --> 00:21:53.250

Mark Morris: But I really want, in the very few minutes we have today, to look at three pillars of rhetoric, the three parts of making an argument to help you win.

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00:21:53.710 --> 00:21:56.930

Mark Morris: Logos, your logical argument.

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00:21:57.070 --> 00:21:58.030

Mark Morris: This is...

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00:21:58.900 --> 00:22:09.909

Mark Morris: when you write something, particularly within the public sector, generally, you want to take your reader from where they are to where you want them to be, from A to B.

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00:22:10.920 --> 00:22:23.839

Mark Morris: And that means you need a logical argument. This is where you, add in your facts and figures, your different policy ideas. And it's, you know, it's all very logical, and very, very important.

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00:22:23.950 --> 00:22:27.160

Mark Morris: But by itself, it's generally not enough.

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00:22:27.230 --> 00:22:39.880

Mark Morris: Because we're not abstract creatures, and we're not completely rational. We're human. And so that means we need the second pillar, which is pathos, an emotional connection.

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00:22:39.880 --> 00:22:49.880

Mark Morris: Now, here, I'm not talking about trying to make your reader laugh or cry, and get all emotional about, you know, some policy report that you've written.

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00:22:50.110 --> 00:22:55.020

Mark Morris: This is about remembering always that you are a human being.

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00:22:55.360 --> 00:22:59.939

Mark Morris: You're communicating, trying to connect with another human being.

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00:23:00.960 --> 00:23:09.840

Mark Morris: And that means you include real-world examples. How is this new policy, for example, going to change people's lives?

145

00:23:10.350 --> 00:23:19.190

Mark Morris: I remember when I was at the Department of Health, and I'd be talking to, you know, fantastically clever people,

146

00:23:19.190 --> 00:23:36.940

Mark Morris: in different fields of medicine or science, and, you know, I wouldn't really have a clue what they were talking about, which happens a lot. My ignorance was my friend, I swear to it, because I would always then go into the question, yeah, but what does that mean for?

147

00:23:37.360 --> 00:23:48.379

Mark Morris: What does that mean for is a really powerful question. What does that mean for patients? What does that mean for doctors, for nurses, for whoever this particular policy is going to affect?

148

00:23:48.930 --> 00:24:01.839

Mark Morris: And if you think about the people, and if you give examples, case studies, you make that connection, then your logical argument will be enhanced immeasurably.

149

00:24:03.360 --> 00:24:04.700

Mark Morris: The third one is E.

150

00:24:04.700 --> 00:24:07.639

Alice Sinclair: Sorry, Mark, I'm just gonna jump in to let you know you've got 2 minutes.

151

00:24:07.640 --> 00:24:23.279

Mark Morris: Oh, my word, there's so much I'm gonna have to miss out. And the third one is the credibility of your speaker, of your information. This can be very, very brief, but you have to make people understand why they should read what you're reading.

152

00:24:23.950 --> 00:24:30.370

Mark Morris: I'm going to... oh, no, here we go, here we go. Attitude. It's a good place to finish.

153

00:24:30.560 --> 00:24:39.380

Mark Morris: Quite often, when we write, particularly if we're not confident in our writing ability, when we look back at the words that we've written.

154

00:24:39.890 --> 00:24:48.399

Mark Morris: And we see mistakes in it. We get... we get depressed, we get sad, and we think, oh, I'm a terrible writer, I can't do this.

155

00:24:48.870 --> 00:25:01.659

Mark Morris: That's the wrong attitude. I want you all to promise me today that you will scrap that attitude, because what you need to be is you need to be, like, this beautiful jaguar in the jungle.

156

00:25:01.870 --> 00:25:15.799

Mark Morris: Hunting for prey. Hunting for your errors, for your mistakes, for your clunky, structure, for your repeated words, missing words, any errors. Because, and when you find it.

157

00:25:15.850 --> 00:25:28.660

Mark Morris: Just like the Jaguar, when he's got his meal, he'll celebrate! Yay! Brilliant! Fantastic! Celebrate your mistakes, because when you've found an error, that's one fewer error

158

00:25:28.660 --> 00:25:36.430

Mark Morris: that your reader will find. Every single mistake is a step towards improving your work.

159

00:25:36.690 --> 00:25:45.469

Mark Morris: And if you can do that, that will be fantastic. So, the attitude, be positive with what you're doing.

160

00:25:45.980 --> 00:25:50.759

Mark Morris: I'm... Riser's block, this is a great one. Just...

161

00:25:51.210 --> 00:25:58.400

Mark Morris: Okay, I'm gonna have to skip all... embrace bad writing. People are frightened. They want to write the best thing first go.

162

00:25:58.400 --> 00:26:12.820

Mark Morris: Don't worry about that. Write something terrible, and then improve it. And I'll tell you much more about this in my course, if you'd like to. A little bit of plug here. Now I'm not a civil servant anymore, I need to earn some money.

163

00:26:13.000 --> 00:26:28.039

Mark Morris: here is a lovely little QR code, I would love it if you could scan it, and there's so much detail, that I go into and expand upon, in the course. So, if you would like to know more, if you'd like to spend, some hours

164

00:26:28.040 --> 00:26:33.689

Mark Morris: With me going over how to be a brilliant, effective writer, then, that would be great.

165

00:26:33.760 --> 00:26:39.170

Mark Morris: And that, I think, is me, so now I need to stop sharing my screen.

166

00:26:40.320 --> 00:26:49.489

Alice Sinclair: Thank you so much, Mark. That was... that was really great. I have underlined here, you need to do the hard work, not your reader. I think that's a great message to take away. Fantastic.

167

00:26:49.490 --> 00:27:04.319

Alice Sinclair: Peter, I will hand over to you in just a second. I just want to take a moment to encourage everyone to get their questions submitted in time for the Q&A. We do have two experts here with us, so please don't hold back. Remember, there's no such thing as a bad question.

168

00:27:04.320 --> 00:27:17.190

Alice Sinclair: Right. Benita, when you're ready, and when you, you can share your, share your slides, and you have 15 minutes. And again, I can jump in 2 minutes ahead of the end of time, just so you know when to wrap up.

169

00:27:18.000 --> 00:27:22.780

Benita Adesuyan: Okay, great, thank you so much. And Mark, that was amazing. I was also...

170

00:27:22.990 --> 00:27:28.429

Benita Adesuyan: Taking a lot of notes, as you were speaking there, so it was so, so helpful.

171

00:27:30.000 --> 00:27:34.430

Benita Adesuyan: Let me just make sure that my... Pages are being shown.

172

00:27:35.080 --> 00:27:36.190

Benita Adesuyan: Probably...

173

00:28:00.020 --> 00:28:04.270

Benita Adesuyan: A little bit of a technical issue here with my presentation.

174

00:28:05.280 --> 00:28:10.760

Alice Sinclair: Okay, we could see it a second ago, Benita. It was... it was sharing.

175

00:28:13.790 --> 00:28:14.590

Alice Sinclair: There we go.

176

00:28:16.620 --> 00:28:18.159

Benita Adesuyan: You're seeing my notes.

177

00:28:18.500 --> 00:28:23.149

Alice Sinclair: Yeah, we can see your... we can see your, notes and your presentation at the moment.

178

00:28:23.530 --> 00:28:27.479

Alice Sinclair: We can just see your presentation now.

179

00:28:27.790 --> 00:28:28.570

Benita Adesuyan: Okay.

180

00:28:28.930 --> 00:28:29.910

Alice Sinclair: Okay, great.

181

00:28:29.910 --> 00:28:36.500

Benita Adesuyan: Hopefully, you can just see the presentation part now. Yeah. Okay, fantastic, thank you. All right, so...

182

00:28:36.830 --> 00:28:39.979

Benita Adesuyan: It is an absolute pleasure to be part of this.

183

00:28:40.080 --> 00:28:49.089

Benita Adesuyan: webinar today. And I love being able to talk about communication and how we do that.

184

00:28:49.150 --> 00:29:03.420

Benita Adesuyan: I'll just give you a very brief, introduction to myself, because I've noticed the time goes really fast. So, as Alice said in her initial introduction, I have worked in

185

00:29:03.620 --> 00:29:05.710

Benita Adesuyan: communications for...

186

00:29:06.420 --> 00:29:21.550

Benita Adesuyan: well over 10 years, 10 to 15 years now, and most of my experience has been in the private sector. I've worked for large organizations in education, entertainment, financial services, I've done PR and internal communications.

187

00:29:21.550 --> 00:29:27.079

Benita Adesuyan: As well as being in... writing for magazines in the UK and in the UAE.

188

00:29:27.430 --> 00:29:32.870

Benita Adesuyan: So in one way or another, I've always Worked with words.

189

00:29:32.960 --> 00:29:44.640

Benita Adesuyan: And helped people, and organisations connect with their audiences and achieve their objectives, whether that's navigating change, or managing crisis, celebrating WINS.

190

00:29:44.650 --> 00:29:54.650

Benita Adesuyan: And now, I have the pleasure of being a civil servant here in the Cayman Islands. I work for the Ministry of Health, Environment, and Sustainability.

191

00:29:54.800 --> 00:30:02.180

Benita Adesuyan: And I believe... Like many of you, of course, in your different roles, that words can really build trust.

192

00:30:02.320 --> 00:30:06.430

Benita Adesuyan: That they can spark action, and they can bring people together.

193

00:30:08.010 --> 00:30:11.269

Benita Adesuyan: As civil servants, no matter what we do, whether we have

194

00:30:11.550 --> 00:30:15.140

Benita Adesuyan: Writing or communications in our job titles.

195

00:30:15.760 --> 00:30:18.419

Benita Adesuyan: Every word we use matters.

196

00:30:18.590 --> 00:30:26.519

Benita Adesuyan: I found this quote in my research and preparation, and I think this just really brings the heart of my message.

197

00:30:26.650 --> 00:30:29.400

Benita Adesuyan: It's just, you should use common words.

198

00:30:29.730 --> 00:30:32.119

Benita Adesuyan: To say uncommon things.

199

00:30:32.230 --> 00:30:39.500

Benita Adesuyan: How we communicate internally to colleagues, it impacts morale, the way we work together, even speed.

200

00:30:39.670 --> 00:30:52.550

Benita Adesuyan: the way... how quickly we can move things through. You know, it changes how a person might understand what health access they have, what benefits they can access, as well as how we trust

201

00:30:52.750 --> 00:30:56.859

Benita Adesuyan: Our... in government and our institutions.

202

00:30:58.990 --> 00:31:02.000

Benita Adesuyan: And I think, for me, the most important thing

203

00:31:02.650 --> 00:31:07.130

Benita Adesuyan: When it comes to finding our voice in government communications.

204

00:31:07.260 --> 00:31:26.469

Benita Adesuyan: is that we don't want to sound like robots and automatons, because we are not, and we are not communicating with robots, we are communicating with people, and what we're sharing impacts their lives. So the aim of our communication should always be to reach and to engage.

205

00:31:26.820 --> 00:31:28.060

Benita Adesuyan: with people.

206

00:31:28.500 --> 00:31:30.870

Benita Adesuyan: So, in the course of these

207

00:31:31.670 --> 00:31:46.460

Benita Adesuyan: 10-ish minutes that we have, I'm just gonna hopefully get through some of these points today. So I'll be talking about finding your voice, I'm gonna show you a case study from here in the Cayman Islands, we'll talk a little bit about how all your writing is strategic.

208

00:31:46.460 --> 00:31:57.230

Benita Adesuyan: Authenticity being key, how to slay some of our jog... what I call jargon dragons, and I'll give you some tips and takeaways that will, I hope.

209

00:31:57.240 --> 00:32:06.560

Benita Adesuyan: Help you to communicate with additional confidence, and to feel confident to use your own voice.

210

00:32:07.600 --> 00:32:08.290

Benita Adesuyan: Okay.

211

00:32:08.410 --> 00:32:12.970

Benita Adesuyan: So, how do we keep our writing professional and

212

00:32:13.150 --> 00:32:22.449

Benita Adesuyan: personal. If we want our messages to land internally and externally with the publics that we're serving, we've got to combine authority with

213

00:32:22.850 --> 00:32:26.699

Benita Adesuyan: Authenticity, with some personality and professionalism.

214

00:32:26.920 --> 00:32:35.679

Benita Adesuyan: And I've got just... Two simple examples, and these are taken from emails and...

215

00:32:36.320 --> 00:32:53.509

Benita Adesuyan: headlines that we've seen. I think we've probably all seen messages that are a bit like these on the right-hand side. Might not be anything technically wrong with it, but they're not really rush... making you rush to sign up, or read more, or engage. They're somewhat flat.

216

00:32:54.030 --> 00:33:01.090

Benita Adesuyan: And I think often as civil servants, we can get lost in that need to be

217

00:33:01.360 --> 00:33:08.500

Benita Adesuyan: neutral, or to be very concise. We tend to tell it like it is without necessarily,

218

00:33:09.460 --> 00:33:16.769

Benita Adesuyan: sparking more emotion, or giving a little more information. Doesn't necessarily answer the so what.

219

00:33:17.270 --> 00:33:28.850

Benita Adesuyan: Sometimes small changes can make a difference. We can make it more personal to your reader, make it more relevant to them, as well as keeping it clear.

220

00:33:29.090 --> 00:33:31.210

Benita Adesuyan: And if you have the space.

221

00:33:31.500 --> 00:33:38.960

Benita Adesuyan: Sometimes longer is actually better, so that you can give your readers what they need to be able to see the big picture.

222

00:33:39.110 --> 00:33:42.179

Benita Adesuyan: As well as being honest, and being specific.

223

00:33:44.180 --> 00:34:01.179

Benita Adesuyan: So, I'd like to give you a little case study from the Cayman Islands. Like many of you, I'm lucky to work in a place that has a very rich cultural heritage, and bringing that culture to our communications is really key to how we can connect

224

00:34:01.300 --> 00:34:02.949

Benita Adesuyan: with our community.

225

00:34:05.010 --> 00:34:22.560

Benita Adesuyan: I'll just give you a very brief overview of the Cayman Islands. I'm sure some of you will be familiar, maybe some of you not so much. But actually, the Cayman Islands really is... it's 3 islands, Grand Cayman, Cayman, Little Cayman, and our total population is around 88,000.

226

00:34:22.560 --> 00:34:25.590

Benita Adesuyan: I notice a lot of you are from the UK, so...

227

00:34:25.610 --> 00:34:34.229

Benita Adesuyan: put it this way, our whole population would fit inside Wembley Stadium, and we'd still have some elbow room to dance around.

228

00:34:34.239 --> 00:34:50.270

Benita Adesuyan: So, very small, community. And that actually brings together a real sense of familiarity, and especially with our elected officials. People really know who their ministers are. We call them even by their nicknames.

229

00:34:50.270 --> 00:34:56.680

Benita Adesuyan: So it's... you can bump it into them, into the supermarket. So it creates a real sense of...

230

00:34:56.730 --> 00:34:58.310

Benita Adesuyan: Relatability.

231

00:34:59.260 --> 00:35:17.750

Benita Adesuyan: Now, non-Kaymanians make up around 54% of our population, and it is a British overseas territory, so English, British English, is the official language, and many young people do study abroad in the UK, or in the US, and there is also a very strong US

232

00:35:17.750 --> 00:35:19.440

Benita Adesuyan: Influence here.

233

00:35:19.920 --> 00:35:22.480

Benita Adesuyan: However, like much of the Caribbean.

234

00:35:23.320 --> 00:35:39.149

Benita Adesuyan: the Cayman Islands has its own dialect, and it has its own accent, which is also distinct from some of the other Caribbean countries. But with the change in demographic, there was a sense that some of that was kind of dying out, or fading, really, from the public sphere.

235

00:35:39.190 --> 00:35:44.830

Benita Adesuyan: So one of our ministries, the Ministry of Youth, Sports and Heritage, they ran a campaign called Where We're From.

236

00:35:44.970 --> 00:36:02.309

Benita Adesuyan: And that was to really bring awareness and preservation of the old Caymanian dialect, specifically from an area called West Bay. And they did this with social media and videos, it featured ministers and members of the public trying to guess a word of the day. So they took a piece of dialect, one term.

237

00:36:02.500 --> 00:36:10.360

Benita Adesuyan: or phrase from the dialect, to see if people really understood what that was. So let's take a look at one of those videos.

238

00:36:18.470 --> 00:36:19.770

Audio shared by Benita Adesuyan: What?

239

00:36:23.270 --> 00:36:24.640

Audio shared by Benita Adesuyan: Beautiful.

240

00:36:25.540 --> 00:36:31.199

Audio shared by Benita Adesuyan: I don't know, it sounds like you're pounding in meals, or hitting something.

241

00:36:31.750 --> 00:36:38.480

Audio shared by Benita Adesuyan: Let your behind.

242

00:36:38.760 --> 00:36:45.510

Audio shared by Benita Adesuyan: Bot bot? Bot bot? As in the ear bot?

243

00:36:45.870 --> 00:36:51.499

Audio shared by Benita Adesuyan: Are you from?

244

00:36:52.340 --> 00:36:55.590

Audio shared by Benita Adesuyan: Buck, bot.

245

00:36:56.000 --> 00:36:58.039

Audio shared by Benita Adesuyan: Not by coast.

246

00:36:59.120 --> 00:37:02.889

Audio shared by Benita Adesuyan: Fuck, fuck. A fuck person.

247

00:37:03.390 --> 00:37:06.489

Audio shared by Benita Adesuyan: I got a question. You know what bot about me?

248

00:37:13.540 --> 00:37:20.999

Audio shared by Benita Adesuyan: No, like... When you carry someone...

249

00:37:21.180 --> 00:37:24.970

Audio shared by Benita Adesuyan: Yeah, he said, he said to reverse.

250

00:37:25.240 --> 00:37:27.290

Audio shared by Benita Adesuyan: Okay. Alright.

251

00:37:31.100 --> 00:37:31.820

Benita Adesuyan: So...

252

00:37:32.110 --> 00:37:50.059

Benita Adesuyan: In case you didn't get that, back-back means to reverse, and I was discussing this with one of my colleagues, you know, she was saying that, you know, these are terms that, you know, they used to use a great deal at home, and yes, you know, it was exciting for people to be able to see these terms, used in a public way.

253

00:37:50.240 --> 00:37:57.840

Benita Adesuyan: And social media... I find is a great space in which, we can share some of that.

254

00:37:57.980 --> 00:38:09.609

Benita Adesuyan: When we did this campaign, you know, it was also backed up with captions from social media, we used a variety of different terminologies, but our audience really do expect

255

00:38:09.650 --> 00:38:26.189

Benita Adesuyan: relatability, they expect transparency, and our voice is how, as a government, we earn that trust, and being able to add, when appropriate, some local vernacular, it really helps us to connect, and protect the culture, which is also very important to people.

256

00:38:26.410 --> 00:38:44.380

Benita Adesuyan: And I know many of you are also in the same, apolitical forum, but this was also a conversation that we had in that forum about how we can use local terminology and vernacular in public services, and I think this is a great example of it, of it really working.

257

00:38:44.530 --> 00:38:54.049

Benita Adesuyan: So, if you are in a similar jurisdiction or region, I would really encourage you to consider using some local terms when it's appropriate to do so.

258

00:38:56.040 --> 00:39:08.670

Benita Adesuyan: And here are some other social media posts from the Cayman Islands government, where we have also tried to use a little bit of... a little bit of flavor, a little bit of personality to help us really connect

259

00:39:12.420 --> 00:39:17.009

Benita Adesuyan: So, all communication is strategic. I think that no matter

260

00:39:17.250 --> 00:39:25.629

Benita Adesuyan: who you're speaking to. You are... it might be an email, it might be... A speech that you're writing.

261

00:39:25.920 --> 00:39:43.230

Benita Adesuyan: everything that you are putting out into the world, you want to have an objective. There is a desired purpose for that writing. And whenever I'm writing, one of the things that I always do before I begin is I think about these three things.

262

00:39:43.570 --> 00:39:46.990

Benita Adesuyan: That is to know field.

263

00:39:47.530 --> 00:39:48.660

Benita Adesuyan: And do.

264

00:39:49.870 --> 00:39:54.140

Benita Adesuyan: All three of these Points are important.

265

00:39:54.610 --> 00:40:00.260

Benita Adesuyan: I want to think about what do I want my audience to know? What do I want them to feel? What do I want to do?

266

00:40:00.510 --> 00:40:14.939

Benita Adesuyan: But I want to challenge us to really think more about feel. Feel sets the tone for the message. It's actually kind of like the... the wrapping that the no and the do, you know, our action points are wrapped in.

267

00:40:15.010 --> 00:40:27.590

Benita Adesuyan: When we focus on the field, we have the opportunity to provoke emotion, to be creative. And connecting to emotion actually anchors our tone

268

00:40:27.720 --> 00:40:30.869

Benita Adesuyan: And then we can go with the rationality second.

269

00:40:31.770 --> 00:40:40.060

Benita Adesuyan: Many people react and respond when communication is more personal, emotive, and human.

270

00:40:40.990 --> 00:40:43.139

Benita Adesuyan: Now, authenticity is key.

271

00:40:43.890 --> 00:40:57.260

Benita Adesuyan: For our person... our writing to be professional and personal, we do need to be authentic and honest. And I again refer to the quote, using common words to express uncommon things.

272

00:41:00.150 --> 00:41:02.900

Benita Adesuyan: I would always recommend that you write

273

00:41:04.460 --> 00:41:08.100

Benita Adesuyan: Conversationally, this will obviously depend on the...

274

00:41:10.010 --> 00:41:17.499

Benita Adesuyan: On what specific piece of communication you are creating, but really know your audience and be honest.

275

00:41:17.930 --> 00:41:24.959

Benita Adesuyan: I would say for things like emails, maybe don't go too far, don't overuse the emojis, but...

276

00:41:25.180 --> 00:41:42.340

Benita Adesuyan: Keeping it simple, sounding true to yourself, is essential. If I'm writing for one of my ministers, for example, I can use expressions that seem right to them. I will hear their voice. That may not be the same way that I would necessarily write for myself.

277

00:41:42.340 --> 00:41:45.920

Benita Adesuyan: And I do believe that in this AI age, where

278

00:41:45.970 --> 00:41:49.210

Benita Adesuyan: you know, we want to avoid sounding like ChatGPT.

279

00:41:49.530 --> 00:41:53.980

Benita Adesuyan: Understanding your true voice becomes all the more important.

280

00:41:55.700 --> 00:41:59.860

Alice Sinclair: Benita, sorry, I'm just going to pop in to let you know you've got 2 minutes.

281

00:42:00.170 --> 00:42:04.429

Benita Adesuyan: Fantastic, thank you so much. Okay, I'm gonna be super fast here. Okay, so...

282

00:42:05.170 --> 00:42:18.920

Benita Adesuyan: again, if you want us writing to sparkle, we need to slay some of our corporate jargon, these jargon dragons, I call them. And a lot of these other terms that we had in the icebreaker,

283

00:42:20.610 --> 00:42:27.059

Benita Adesuyan: leverage, say, influence. Why are we saying touch base when what we really want to do is talk?

284

00:42:27.290 --> 00:42:39.209

Benita Adesuyan: You know, let's try and get to the heart of the matter. Eliminating these jargon dragons forces us to be more specific and more personal in the way that we express ourselves.

285

00:42:40.760 --> 00:42:44.630

Benita Adesuyan: So, I want to leave you... With...

286

00:42:46.290 --> 00:42:49.489

Benita Adesuyan: A few tips and takeaways. So, always ask yourself.

287

00:42:49.700 --> 00:42:56.160

Benita Adesuyan: Is your text clear? Is it relatable? Is it... credible.

288

00:42:56.700 --> 00:43:12.229

Benita Adesuyan: When I first moved to the Cayman Islands, I used to take the bus. Most people drive here, but I used to take the bus and see all walks of life, construction workers, grandmas get into the supermarket, and I think to myself, when I'm writing something for the general public.

289

00:43:12.230 --> 00:43:18.079

Benita Adesuyan: Would that grandma getting on the bus with her shopping bags understand what I'm saying? Is it clear?

290

00:43:18.340 --> 00:43:20.690

Benita Adesuyan: Does it... would it connect with her?

291

00:43:21.060 --> 00:43:27.149

Benita Adesuyan: And before my time runs out, I also want to give you 3 tips for you to try.

292

00:43:27.340 --> 00:43:34.899

Benita Adesuyan: So... First of all, take the band words challenge. Ruthlessly eliminate jargon.

293

00:43:35.520 --> 00:43:37.259

Benita Adesuyan: Write your first draft?

294

00:43:38.200 --> 00:43:39.980

Benita Adesuyan: And look for those words.

295

00:43:40.450 --> 00:43:44.319

Benita Adesuyan: Take them out. Take your time, and replace them.

296

00:43:44.690 --> 00:43:56.529

Benita Adesuyan: And the more you do it, the more that you will start to see, one, you'll start to identify them, but two, you'll also start to look for alternative words. Secondly, translate your inner bureaucrat.

297

00:43:56.780 --> 00:44:07.320

Benita Adesuyan: rewrite the text as if you're explaining it for a friend over a coffee. If you can't explain it, you don't get it, then maybe you don't fully understand it, maybe you have more questions to ask.

298

00:44:07.320 --> 00:44:19.650

Benita Adesuyan: But you can do this with every kind of writing, but I think it's so important to just try and make sure that we don't kind of stay in that bubble of bureaucratic or legally speech.

299

00:44:19.690 --> 00:44:27.759

Benita Adesuyan: And thirdly, read aloud. If it's confusing to you, it's probably going to be confusing to your audience as well.

300

00:44:28.250 --> 00:44:39.400

Benita Adesuyan: And lastly, I'll just share with you a study that I found from the University of California. So, Daniel Oppenheimer found that people are considered

301

00:44:39.760 --> 00:44:52.430

Benita Adesuyan: smarter when their message is easier to understand. He said, people associate intelligence with clarity of expression. So, if you want your writing to sizzle, just keep it simple.

302

00:44:53.550 --> 00:45:02.720

Benita Adesuyan: I think that's probably the end of my time. So, I just want to say thank you so much, and of course, if you have any further questions, I'd be happy to answer them.

303

00:45:07.120 --> 00:45:15.999

Alice Sinclair: Thank you so much, Vinita, that was really interesting, I loved that. And as Jill said in the comments, back-back, it's plain English at its best.

304

00:45:17.140 --> 00:45:42.140

Alice Sinclair: And remember to keep dropping in any questions you have for our speakers in the Zoom Q&A, and just before we do dive into your questions, I want to let everyone know that we've also curated a great follow-on resource to today's topic that we think you'll find useful. It's an exclusive playlist of the best articles on writing tips from apolitical members. And to receive your link to the article playlist, you just need to go into the Writing in Government community.

305

00:45:42.140 --> 00:45:53.910

Alice Sinclair: after the event, and leave a comment on the post that is pinned at the top of the page, and then we'll send you the resource by email on Monday. My colleague has also posted a link to that thread in the chat.

306

00:45:54.310 --> 00:46:07.259

Alice Sinclair: Okay, so now we're on to the Q&A. So, so I will direct the first question, which is from Nicola, to Mark. So this is...

307

00:46:07.300 --> 00:46:22.329

Alice Sinclair: Are there any writing courses or training available to civil servants that you would recommend attending? And also, a question that a lot of people in the chat have asked is, they would love to know what the course was that you took that changed your career.

308

00:46:22.330 --> 00:46:35.509

Mark Morris: Well, the course I took, existed 20-odd years ago, so, whether or not you can still go to it... to be honest, to recommend a course, within the civil service.

309

00:46:35.850 --> 00:46:49.850

Mark Morris: I haven't been in the civil service since 2014, so I can't answer that question. it was... I mean, back when I did it, it was... what was it called? I think it was called the School of Government?

310

00:46:50.270 --> 00:46:54.819

Mark Morris: or the Civil Service College, I think it changed its name.

311

00:46:54.820 --> 00:47:10.899

Mark Morris: I mean, it was... it was 20-odd years ago, so I really don't know. I obviously would recommend my course. It's brilliant. I try and put everything that I've learned over the last 20 years into that, so I think I'd highly, highly recommend it, it's lots of fun.

312

00:47:11.040 --> 00:47:17.870

Mark Morris: But, I mean, there are resources around. I saw someone posted a link to the,

313

00:47:17.870 --> 00:47:32.019

Mark Morris: the plainenglish.co.uk, is that the Campaign for Plain English? I know the Campaign for Plain English has got some good resources out there. There are lots of, things, but in terms of a specific course to do within the Civil Service, I haven't...

314

00:47:32.020 --> 00:47:36.079

Mark Morris: I haven't got any, any, thing I can really honestly recommend.

315

00:47:36.130 --> 00:47:55.590

Alice Sinclair: Of course, I'd be amiss if I didn't mention apolitical's writing courses as well. You can always go into the Writing Effectively in Government Community and find them in there. But yes, thank you, Mark, that's great. And then, Benita, the next one is for you. You mentioned...

316

00:47:55.590 --> 00:48:03.939

Alice Sinclair: Not wanting to sound like ChatGPT in our writing, sounding human, but what are your views on using AI to help with writing?

317

00:48:05.400 --> 00:48:12.939

Benita Adesuyan: With ChatGPT, Obviously, this is always going to be the hot topic,

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00:48:13.730 --> 00:48:17.060

Benita Adesuyan: If we're going to use it, I do think that

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00:48:17.450 --> 00:48:19.050

Benita Adesuyan: It can help you to get

320

00:48:19.200 --> 00:48:24.510

Benita Adesuyan: started. It might even help you to get somewhat of a first draft.

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00:48:25.320 --> 00:48:28.329

Benita Adesuyan: But... do not do the copy.

322

00:48:28.470 --> 00:48:29.510

Benita Adesuyan: And paste.

323

00:48:30.600 --> 00:48:48.430

Benita Adesuyan: as Mark said at the beginning, we're the ones that has to do... have to do that bit of hard work. We know our audience, and we're the ones that can add our personality. I think we're actually getting to a point with AI where people are starting to

324

00:48:49.110 --> 00:48:50.650

Benita Adesuyan: recognize it?

325

00:48:51.080 --> 00:49:03.820

Benita Adesuyan: And I just think, you know, no matter what level you're at, no matter what your job title is, use AI to help you as a production tool, but do not

326

00:49:03.930 --> 00:49:09.880

Benita Adesuyan: rest upon it. We've got to be able to add our own voice, it's so key, so key.

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00:49:11.540 --> 00:49:16.540

Mark Morris: just add in there, I think it's right. It's a really useful tool. I use AI.

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00:49:17.100 --> 00:49:27.489

Mark Morris: I tend to use Anthropic, he's, Claude. I don't use it really for writing, but I do use it as a, as a critique.

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00:49:27.510 --> 00:49:35.259

Mark Morris: Something I would recommend to anyone who works in a team is you get a proofreading buddy.

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00:49:35.260 --> 00:49:52.300

Mark Morris: And so whenever I wrote a speech, and NATO, for example, there were 3 speechwriters, and as part of our process, I would write something, or Claire or Delith would write something, we would share it with each other, and we would work in that really positive way, really positive attitude to try and improve the product.

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00:49:52.300 --> 00:50:00.829

Mark Morris: Now I'm writing by myself. I don't have someone to share it with, so I share it with Claude. And I asked Claude, the Anthropic AI,

332

00:50:01.060 --> 00:50:13.699

Mark Morris: to critique my work, and make suggestions, you know, is it concise enough? Is it clear enough? All this sort of stuff. And that can be really useful.

333

00:50:14.490 --> 00:50:29.010

Mark Morris: what Benita said about owning it is so crucial, because for a start, if you don't write something, if AI writes something, what's the point of view? What value are you bringing? You have to show that.

334

00:50:30.010 --> 00:50:38.969

Mark Morris: But also, if it's... If you just get it to... to write something for you,

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00:50:39.770 --> 00:50:42.130

Mark Morris: It makes stuff up.

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00:50:42.390 --> 00:51:01.049

Mark Morris: I asked it for some horse riding... I was going to go on a horse riding holiday a couple of years ago, it was amazing, and I asked for some horse riding, this is ChatGPT, give me some places in Belgium, where I was living at the time, where I can learn to ride a horse. And it gave me 10 places with

337

00:51:01.050 --> 00:51:04.969

Mark Morris: Phone numbers, and addresses, and websites, and email addresses.

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00:51:05.140 --> 00:51:08.930

Mark Morris: And not one of them existed.

339

00:51:09.090 --> 00:51:24.310

Mark Morris: It made it all up. I... when ChatGBT was first launched, I tried to get it to, write a first draft of, it was a small wreath-laying speech to celebrate Estonian Independence Day.

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00:51:25.440 --> 00:51:30.749

Mark Morris: And it just made up the history of Estonia. It was... it was... it was almost right.

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00:51:31.240 --> 00:51:47.719

Mark Morris: But if I'd actually given that speech, and it wasn't really a very good speech either, if I'd actually given that, to the Secretary-General, and for some reason no one had bothered to check it, and he went and delivered this speech in Estonia with the Estonian president.

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00:51:48.330 --> 00:51:52.049

Mark Morris: It... well, I wouldn't be a speechwriter anymore, let's just say that.

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00:51:52.260 --> 00:52:00.180

Alice Sinclair: Yeah, I dread to think. Thank you, Mark, that's great. Actually, another one for you, Mark, from Miranda.

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00:52:00.290 --> 00:52:11.579

Alice Sinclair: How would you balance plain English and the need for accessibility with situations which call for technical language? For example, if you're interpreting legislation, how would you balance those two things?

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00:52:11.580 --> 00:52:19.080

Mark Morris: Sure, this is... this is a really good question, and this comes up an awful lot, and sometimes it's easy to sort of mistake

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00:52:19.190 --> 00:52:27.929

Mark Morris: what I and Benita have been saying today about being really clear and about, you know, using everyday language, conversational language.

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00:52:29.550 --> 00:52:37.829

Mark Morris: Thinking that means you're dumbing your work down, and that's not what we're talking about at all. It's, that wonderful

348

00:52:38.220 --> 00:52:44.020

Mark Morris: quote from Oppenheimer, I really like that, I've not heard that one before. I'm gonna steal that.

349

00:52:44.030 --> 00:52:47.460

Benita Adesuyan: It's about comprehension.

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00:52:47.540 --> 00:52:50.650

Mark Morris: It's about making sure that, not that...

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00:52:51.080 --> 00:53:00.420

Mark Morris: Not saying things that aren't complicated, saying things that are complicated in a simple way. And the more complicated

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00:53:00.420 --> 00:53:18.030

Mark Morris: something is, the simpler your language should be, because what's most important is that your audience comprehends it, they understand it. And so if you've got a technical term, some jargon term, and it's important that, that's said and used, and that's completely fine.

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00:53:18.030 --> 00:53:21.750

Mark Morris: Make sure that you explain what it means.

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00:53:21.790 --> 00:53:34.369

Mark Morris: Now, we will all talk quite often, I certainly do, about being as, you know, brevity being so, so important, using fewer words, shorter sentences, but...

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00:53:34.370 --> 00:53:42.529

Mark Morris: Clarity trumps brevity every single time. If your reader doesn't understand what you're talking about.

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00:53:42.780 --> 00:53:46.740

Mark Morris: What's the point of you writing anything in the first place?

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00:53:47.130 --> 00:54:03.559

Mark Morris: So, always be clear. And if that means using technical language, if that means using jargon, fine. Just explain it. And if you've got a really big document, say if you've got a report that's 200 pages long, and you've explained what something means on page 2,

358

00:54:03.870 --> 00:54:22.679

Mark Morris: Don't assume that they've read that, because they might have jumped straight to the one chapter, you know, chapter 8, or whatever, the bit that interests them, and if you don't explain it again there, then they won't have a clue what you're talking about. It's about respecting your reader. Both of us, interestingly, both of us

359

00:54:22.690 --> 00:54:41.130

Mark Morris: use that phrase, respect your reader. Put yourself in their shoes. If they've... if you've got something, that's difficult to understand, explain it. If you've got a big document that people might jump, here, there, and everywhere through, and not read it from page 1 to page 150,

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00:54:41.560 --> 00:54:52.109

Mark Morris: then you have to be aware of that, and explain things as you go, multiple times. It might be obvious to you, it quite possibly won't be obvious to your reader.

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00:54:54.310 --> 00:54:54.960

Alice Sinclair: Yep.

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00:54:54.970 --> 00:55:08.089

Alice Sinclair: That's great, thank you, Mark. So we've got time for one more question, and I'm going to pick... so there's one from Benson here for Benita. He says, great presentations from the speakers.

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00:55:08.090 --> 00:55:15.679

Alice Sinclair: But what can I do personally, every day, to improve my writings? What tips do you have for those kind of everyday practices?

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00:55:16.640 --> 00:55:19.469

Benita Adesuyan: Okay, that's a great question. Thank you, Benson. So.

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00:55:19.690 --> 00:55:27.990

Benita Adesuyan: I would say that first challenge that I suggested, which is when you write, you review.

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00:55:28.240 --> 00:55:37.159

Benita Adesuyan: If you're finding that you are, using certain crutch terms, then you want to identify them.

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00:55:37.550 --> 00:55:40.590

Benita Adesuyan: And challenge yourself to find alternatives.

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00:55:40.730 --> 00:55:42.150

Benita Adesuyan: Secondly.

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00:55:42.530 --> 00:55:58.889

Benita Adesuyan: like Mark suggested, you know, when you are working in the civil service, very often you have got colleagues that, you can work with that might support you. You may have a communications team. Get them to give you some feedback, to give you some tips, so that you can start to identify

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00:55:59.420 --> 00:56:06.160

Benita Adesuyan: What the specific challenge is with the writing, whether it is clarity.

371

00:56:06.470 --> 00:56:19.730

Benita Adesuyan: Or flow, again, depending on what it is that you're creating, but feedback really, really is your friend. And use your colleagues or people in your communications team to help you out with that.

372

00:56:21.360 --> 00:56:23.519

Alice Sinclair: That's fantastic. Thank you, Vinita.

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00:56:23.520 --> 00:56:24.809

Mark Morris: Have I got someone to add something?

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00:56:24.810 --> 00:56:31.449

Alice Sinclair: We are at time. If you could, if you could do it in... if you... okay. Thank you, though.

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00:56:31.450 --> 00:56:32.980

Mark Morris: Just do my course.

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00:56:32.980 --> 00:56:34.060

Alice Sinclair: Yep.

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00:56:34.060 --> 00:56:37.929

Mark Morris: or a political course, I may... it's possible, I might be doing one.

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00:56:38.140 --> 00:56:53.440

Alice Sinclair: Oh, fantastic. Let us know which one you... which one you end up doing. Write a... drop a note in the community, because it would be great to hear from you. But yes, thank you so much. We've had some incredible wisdom from each of our speakers, and I'd like to ask you all to join me in giving Mark and Benita a virtual round of applause.

379

00:56:53.510 --> 00:57:17.420

Alice Sinclair: And most importantly, thanks to you, an audience investing in learning and being so engaged in this topic. It's been great to have you. The team is just going to pull up a quick poll to find out how you felt about today, which will help us continue improving our content. So we just really appreciate your responses there. It's just on a scale of 1 to 10, rank your agreement with this statement. This event was a valuable use of my time.

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00:57:17.420 --> 00:57:25.210

Alice Sinclair: And before you go, whilst you're responding to that poll, I just want to share a few more events that you can register for to join us again soon.

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00:57:25.210 --> 00:57:41.909

Alice Sinclair: If you're not available to be there live, you can always register for the event in order to get sent the recording to catch up whenever suits you. So coming up next Thursday, we

have Reclaiming Your Focus When Everything is Urgent, which is a masterclass on building tools and systems to maintain deep focus at work.

382

00:57:41.910 --> 00:57:57.889

Alice Sinclair: And then in two weeks, we have hacks for working with Copilot, where you'll learn how to do high-quality work more efficiently using Copilot. And then related to today's theme, next month, we will be exploring AI for email writing to help you write more effective emails while saving time.

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00:57:57.960 --> 00:58:09.960

Alice Sinclair: Okay, that is all we have time for today. We hope you found it helpful, and we want to say a huge thank you to our speakers, to everyone who has made today happen, and to you for taking time out of your busy days.

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00:58:10.100 --> 00:58:21.779

Alice Sinclair: Keep an eye out for the email coming your way with today's recording and resources, and we hope to see you at another apolitical event very soon. So, have a great day, and thank you very much, and goodbye!

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00:58:22.760 --> 00:58:23.979

Mark Morris: Bye-bye. Thanks a lot.

386

00:58:23.980 --> 00:58:24.800

Benita Adesuyan: Thank you. Bye-bye.