Tips and Tricks for Authors

Ideas to Help Make Writing Easier

— Find a writing environment that works for you (if necessary, get some ear plugs or listen to music).
— Try using techniques such as outlining, freewriting (writing without concern for grammar and perfect wording), and clustering (graphically putting your ideas down and grouping them) to get you started.
— Work from your notes and outline.
— Begin with the easiest parts.
— Try to get your ideas down quickly, even if it sounds bad.
— Ignore errors and keep going! You can deal with editing and finessing your text later. Just get your ideas down on paper.

Tips for Overcoming Writer’s Block

— Free-write through the block.
— Talk out the problem.
— Reread the last paragraph.
— Check your outline.
— Change your writing environment.
— Take a break! Taking even five minutes to leave the room, go outside for fresh air, or focus on something totally different can help clear your mind.
— Get more blood into your brain. If your body can handle it, lower your head below your heart for 10–15 seconds or so (you can do this in your chair or standing up). (Just don’t get back up too quickly!)

General Writing Guidelines

— Rely on your outline to keep you on target—use your headings to organize content.
— Use transitional words or phrases to move between sentences and paragraphs. (See related job aid.)
— Present your message in clear, logical paragraphs.
— There should be a point to everything you put in a document you write. Ask yourself, “So what?” If you can’t answer that question, leave the item out.
— Always substantiate your claims/prove everything you say, but put only as much technical detail into your text as you need to substantiate your claim.
— If appropriate, anticipate problems and risks and address them.
— Where applicable, summarize key content.
— Revise if your message isn’t absolutely clear.
— If working on a multi-author document, be sure that your portion matches/doesn’t contradict something someone else wrote.
— Cut “dead wood” (extra wording) where possible. (See related job aid.)
— Use active voice whenever possible, but realize passive voice has its place, too. (See related job aid.)

Before Submitting a Document

— If you’re concerned about the content of your document, have another set of eyes look at it.
— Check to make sure you didn’t forget a point you meant to make. Your introductory paragraph to a section or book might have promised something—make sure you deliver on it.
— Run spell check.
— Do all of your numbers add up? Check.
— Are the facts, names, and references, right? Check.
— Do all of your cross-references have the correct section number referenced?
— If using graphics (figures/tables) to make a point, are they all numbered? Are they all mentioned in the text that comes before them? Do they all have titles so it’s clear to the reader what he/she is looking at? Do the text and graphics match—i.e., if something is shown in a figure, is it referenced in the text, and vice versa: does the figure reflect the text’s content? (See related job aid.)
— Check your consistency—spelling, use of acronyms throughout, and how you reference things; e.g., don’t use synonyms when the language on how you refer to something should be standardized.
— Check your headings—Does their order make sense? Do they reflect the content of the paragraphs/subheadings that follow?
— See related “Editor’s Checklist” job aid.

Know What Help Is Available

CCSDS documents aren’t written in a vacuum—you are not alone in your document-development process!
— Rely on your Working Group for input.
— Get your CCSDS Supplemental Editor involved early in the process when/if you need help. E-mail cynthia@sachs-bustos.com for assistance.
— Use the job aids and other tools available in the CCSDS Author’s Toolkit under the CESG tab in the Collaborative Work Environment.

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October 2013