



## HOME & COUNTRY

HOME & COUNTRY is published quarterly by the Federated Women's Institutes of Ontario (FWIO). It has two objectives:

1. To provide educational material which cultivates more knowledgeable and responsible citizens and promotes good family life skills, leadership development and community action.
2. To provide a "communications link" among all members of the Federated Women's Institutes of Ontario and other related organizations.

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## Editor's Notebook:

# Write to Express, Not to Impress

By Janine Roelens-Grant

Clear writing presents information in a way that is easy to read and understand. Clear writing is the responsibility of every writer; it is about having respect for your intended audience. Here are a number of clear writing tips:

**Get Your Story in Order** - Put your thoughts in a logical order before you begin. Prepare an outline first, and improve the reader's understanding of the information presented.

**Get to the Point** - Tell your reader what you are writing about in the first sentence or two. Answer the questions "who, what, when, where and why." The details of "how" can follow.

**Keep it Short** - Limit paragraphs to about 100 words or 150 syllables. Limit sentences to about 20 words. Use words that have 5 letters or fewer sixty to seventy per cent of the time. And, keep it to one thought per sentence.

**Keep it Moving** - Grip your reader's attention in the first sentence and make them want to read on. By using the writing tips outlined here you can keep up the momentum.

**Be Active** - Use the active form of a verb, instead of the passive. For example, use "Lead the group..." instead of "The group must be led..." Remember, the following words signal the passive voice: is, was, are, and being.

**Be Positive** - Use a friendly, positive tone in your writing. If the tone is negative, you will not 'catch' and 'keep' the reader's attention.

**Keep it Simple** - Choose concise, lean words and familiar phrases. They are the trademarks of the inshape writer. Fat, weighty words and phrases cause ugly bulges in sentences.

When asked why he used the word 'city' and not 'metropolis' in his writings, Mark Twain said he got paid just as much to use the shorter, simpler word.

Here's a few examples of fat phrases and words and their lean substitutes:

|                      |            |
|----------------------|------------|
| Instead of:          | Try:       |
| consequently         | so         |
| explain              | show, tell |
| facilitate           | help       |
| in regard to         | about      |
| due to the fact that | since      |

**Be Specific** - Name names, accurately. Use complete versions of acronyms the first time. And, if possible, use exact numbers instead of indefinite terms.

**Remember, it takes more time to write a short report. In a letter to a friend, George Bernard Shaw remarked:**

"I'm sorry this letter is so long; I didn't have time to write a short one."



**Be Direct** - Avoid abstract language and idioms. "Honesty is one of her virtues" is a weak and abstract way of saying "I've never heard her lie."

**Be Careful** - Avoid remarks about a person's sex, race, religion, age or physical appearance.

**Emphasize the Action** - Avoid changing verbs into nouns. Write "The group decided..." instead of "A decision was made by the group..."

**Practice** - Finally, to be a clear writer, you must practice. Practice may not make you a great writer, but it will help you become a clear writer.

Remember, write to express, not to impress!