



Writing for a Global Audience

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Why write for a global audience?

- Some of your customers may be outside the U.S.
- Your materials may be read by non-native speakers of English
- You need to make it easy to do business with you



Top 10 things to consider

- Humor
- Noun strings
- Passive voice
- Contractions
- Metaphors
- Graphics and color
- Text in graphics
- Grammar and syntax
- Vocabulary and usage
- Special characters
- Expansion space



Humor

- Don't even think about it.
- Humor rarely translates.



Noun strings

- Long strings of nouns confuse readers
- Before and after examples:
 - Find the glare screen bracket peg adjuster screw
 - Find the screw that adjusts the bracket peg for the glare screen
- The longer sentence is easier to understand
- Noun strings are the second-biggest issue encountered by translators!



Passive voice

- Passive voice is more difficult for non-native English speakers to understand
- Active voice is “stronger.”
- Active voice results in shorter sentences.
 - The dog bit the man. (active voice)
 - The man was bitten by the dog. (passive voice)



Contractions

- Contractions seem “friendly” in the U.S. but can be confusing elsewhere
- Not all languages use verbal contractions
- Contractions make translation more difficult
- If you must use contractions, provide a “map” for translation vendors
 - won’t = will not
 - should’ve = should have



Metaphors & cultural references

- Colorful phrases that are instantly recognizable in the U.S. are meaningless or confusing to a global audience
 - Big Apple (New York City)
 - Networking 101 (Networking Basics)
 - pigskin (football)
 - brown-bag (bring your own lunch)
- Avoid nicknames, holidays, legends



Graphics and color

- Use culturally neutral graphics
 - Avoid hands, animals, religious symbols
 - Use androgynous figures for humans
- Use “natural mappings” for colors
 - red, green, or yellow for apples
 - red and orange for fire
 - yellow for the sun



Text in graphics

- Avoid text in graphics, if you expect your work to be translated
- If unavoidable, then
 - provide source files, if possible
 - use a plain background, to avoid the requirement for air-brushing after translation
 - avoid 3D and other special effects, especially in animated graphics
 - leave plenty of expansion space (more later)



Grammar and syntax

- Use simple sentences of about 16 words
- Delete all unnecessary words
- Use bulleted lists
- Place position-specific words correctly
 - *You need only one*; not *You only need one*
- Use “which” and “that” correctly
 - *These are the rules, which I follow.*
(I follow all of the rules.)
 - *These are the rules that I follow.*
(I follow some of the rules and ignore the rest.)



Grammar and syntax (cont'd)

- Avoid abbreviations and acronyms (except industry-accepted terms like ROM or AGP)
- Avoid the "slash" for *and* and *or*
 - *Jane/Jim will drive to the event* (does that mean both of them, or does it mean one or the other?)
- Avoid *and/or*
- Write out dates (5/9/98 can mean either the 9th of May or the 5th of September)



Grammar and syntax (cont'd)

- Avoid forming a possessive with an apostrophe; use the “of” form instead
 - *the index of the book*; not *the book's index*
- Use the “soft imperative” for Japanese
 - *Be sure the power is on*; not *Turn on the power*
- Use *it's* and *its* correctly
 - *it's = it is*
 - *its = belonging to it*



Vocabulary and usage

- Do not use “domestic” to mean the U.S.
- Avoid words that have multiple meanings
 - Does *invalid* mean *not valid* or *infirm*?
- Avoid *male* and *female*; use *man* and *woman* if you must refer to gender
- Use *translation* only for language; for data, use *conversion*



Words to re-examine

- affect, effect
- agree to, agree with
- alternate, alternative
- assure, ensure, insure
- anticipate, expect
- augment, supplement
- can, may
- complement, compliment
- compose, comprise
- continuous, continual
- discrete, discreet
- disinterested, uninterested
- due to, because of
- its, it's
- oral, verbal
- since, because
- whether, if



Special characters to avoid

- # for *pound*
- \$ for currency
- · (raised period) for multiplication
- “ for *ditto* or *inches*
- ` for *feet*
- ? for *help*
- — for commas or parentheses



Expansion space

- Even for the web, consider that the same content in a different language will expand
- Add 15%, then add additional space depending on the number of characters
 - 1-10 characters 100-200%
 - 11-20 characters 81-100%
 - 21-30 characters 61-80%
 - 31-50 characters 41-60%
 - 51-70 characters 31-40%
 - 71 or more characters 30%



Closing thoughts

- Keep it simple
- Consider your global audience; make it easy for everyone to understand your message
- Use international examples
- Mention global companies