Sound familiar?

• “It's hard to explain this technical stuff.”
• “I don't think people got my message.”
• “Don’t ask me to trivialize my important work.”
• “I'm good at research, but the writing is tough.”
• “My writing could be better.”
• “People need to understand how important this is.”
• “In my head, it makes perfect sense. Then I read it on paper …”
• “I need help.”
Good writing is important

• Effective communication is key to success
  – To conveying your ideas, findings, viewpoints
  – To reaching different but important audiences

• Ineffective writing has a high price
  – Lost opportunities for funding, publishing, understanding
  – Diminished perception, value of work
Recognize the difference

• Research focuses on process, methodology, details
• Writing, at its best, focuses on outcomes
• While process is important for context, outcome/impact is the bottom line.
Know the essentials

• Issue, problem, situation, need
• What are you going to do about it?
• What difference will you make?
• Impact, benefits, outcome

The brutal bottom line:

So what, who cares and why?
What is impact?

It’s the reportable, quantifiable difference, or potential difference, that your work is making in people’s lives.

It clearly, concisely summarizes the social, environmental and/or economic potential or actual difference or outcome of your efforts.
Impact writing

- Illustrates change or potential change in at least one of the following:
  - Economic value or efficiency
  - Environmental quality
  - Social well-being
  - Health and well-being
  - Scientific/technical merit, knowledge
Good impact writing

• Highlights specific results, benefits
• Or potential outcomes

In terms of difference made:
  – Knowledge gained & how it’s used
  – Behavior, attitude changes
  – Practice or situation changes
  – Contributing to economic, social, environmental change

• Keep it brief
Focus on benefits

• Focus on tangible potential outcomes, benefits
• Quantify potential whenever possible
• Explain why this matters and to whom
• Who cares and why – industry, scientists, family, pocketbook, community
• Explain in terms your audience understands, appreciates, relates to
Key impact elements

• The three key impact statement elements:
  – *Issue/problem/situation* (*Who cares and why?*)
  – *What will you do/have you done to address issue?* (*plan of work*)
  – *Potential impact* (*So what?*)
Issue, problem, situation

- Attention-grabbing first paragraph
- Problem/issue paragraph explains why issue/need is important, relevant
- Sets stage, outlines situation, frames issue
- May mention potential payoffs
- National/state statistics provide perspective
- Explains who benefits, why that matters
- Keep this short
What you will do or what you have done

• Briefly summarize what you propose to do
• Simplify your plan of work
• Describe what new ground you’ll break, what makes it new or different
• Provide the scope of your work, processes
• Give only the “gist,” not details
• Funders, partners can fit here
Impact/outcome

• Take-home message – the difference you will make
• Quantify potential economic, environmental, social change when possible
• How your work could change the situation
• Include scope of outcome
• Answer “so what”
• Informed speculation
Examples

- Compact laser
- Dicamba-resistant crops
- Child welfare
Before you write

• Read instructions for the publication or proposal
• Think about your audience
• What do they need to know for decisions?
• Gather supporting information, statistics to make your case
• Organize your thoughts and ideas
• Know your key messages
  – So what? Who cares? Why?
  – What difference will your work make
When you write

• Remember the rules of good writing
• Work to be clear and concise
• Choose your words carefully
• Smaller words and plain language work best
• Simplify/clarify complex information (KISS)
When you write

- Trade unnecessary details for better understanding
- Review, revise, rewrite with a fresh eye
- Ask others to read and comment
- Good writing is not easy
Other tips and tricks

- Word choice (With words … less is more)
- Sentence length
- Active voice
Active vs. passive voice

• Active voice: the subject of sentence does the action
• Passive voice: the subject receives the action
• Strong verbs make for good sentences.
• “By” often is a clue to passive voice.

Passive voice:
• The train was missed by more than half the morning commuters at the station.

Active voice:
• More than half the morning commuters missed the train.
Words of wisdom

• "Just because you're dealing with a scholarly discipline that's usually reported in a style of dry pedantry is no reason why you shouldn't write in good, fresh English."
  – William Zinsser, *On Writing Well*

• "Write with precision, clarity and economy. Every sentence should convey the exact truth as simply as possible."
  – Instructions to authors, *Ecology*, 1964
Thank you