

Effective Use of Bullets

Bullets

- Focus attention by creating “stop points”
- Add structure
- Simplify conclusions
 - clearer rather than long sentences
- Emphasize main points
- Don’t need punctuation

Slowing Down the Reader

When you use ALL CAPS, you slow down the reader. It’s the variation in height of lowercase letters that helpS the brain recognize groups of letters faster. In ALL CAPS, all the letters are the same height.

Food Service FOOD SERVICE

Bold and italics in sentences create “stop points” where eyes stop momentarily. This slows down the reader. Use them if that’s what you want to happen. Too many stop points reduce effectiveness and tire the reader. It also tends to look messy.

Take words out whenever possible. An average eye span is 30 characters, or about three words. That’s what someone can take in at a glance.

Consistency

Use capitalization and punctuation consistently. If you start a list with capital letters, then start each item with a capital. Same with punctuation. In general, it’s best to leave punctuation out of bulleted lists unless all items are full sentences.

Use parallel structure in lists. List contents should be balanced in value:

- Acknowledge input
- Explain group interests
- Standards are necessary
- Running meetings is difficult (HUH? – this doesn’t belong with the other items. It sounds to me like it could be the title or heading of the other three bullets.)

Use strong, active statements. Avoid the past tense:

Management has control over policy vs. Management controlled policies vs. Management controls policy

Avoid repeating words.

Your email:

Messages will all have a subject

Messages will all have a To:

Messages may include attachments

Messages may include more than one recipient

Checklist for Proofing Lists

- Spelling
- Verb tense
- Redundancy
- Capitalization
- Margins
- Line spacing
- Bullet size, style and spacing
- Alignment
- Grammar
- Parallel construction
- Unnecessary words
- Punctuation
- Consistent word placement (i.e., verb first)

Many of the principles in this document, including the checklist, come from a book called *Writing in Bullets* by Kim Long.