Questions to Ask of an Outline

Developing a cogent publication requires keeping your purpose in mind. These ten questions can help you check that your publication is on track right from the concept and outline stages and throughout research, writing, and editing.

When developing the concept, ask:

1. **Who is it for?**

2. **What do we expect these readers to do** as a result of their reading?

When developing the outline, researching, and writing, ask:

3. Are we **addressing the issues that most concern the intended audience(s)?**

4. **What practices, behavior, or policies** do we want to encourage and enable through the presentation and analysis of evidence and experience?

5. Are we **emphasizing the facts that support or call for this new behavior?**

6. Are the **actions/practices/policies** that the facts suggest sufficiently **highlighted** and easy to find? Will a browsing reader spot them?

7. Are facts linked with actions that the intended audience can take?

8. Are we presenting material—and presenting it in a way—that makes use of the **five characteristics of readily adopted behavior** described in Diffusion of Innovation theory?
   
   - Relative advantage
   - Compatibility
   - Simplification
   - Observability
   - Trialability

9. Have we **sacrificed for focus?** Have we presented the crucial content efficiently? For example, have we used tables and graphics where they are more efficient or more cogent than text? Have we weeded out or held to a minimum content that is supplemental or already well-known?


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