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Committee submissions - effective advocacy?

It may come as a surprise, but committee members don't always have the time to read your carefully crafted submission.

These startling numbers from the Senate show how much paperwork is presented to committee members:

63	current open enquiries (Sept 2015)
14	before the Economics Reference Committee
29	average submissions (some have up to 90)
484	pages per enquiry (average)
6776	pages to read for one Committee

Almost twice the length of the two-volume Shorter Oxford Dictionary.
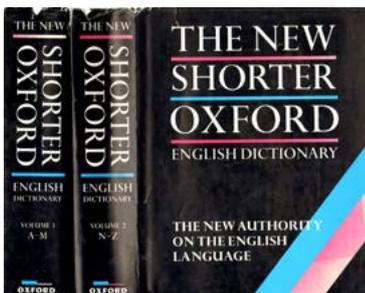
Committee members are often presented with a folder of submissions and only have 12-14 hours notice before public hearings - they are supposed to sleep during that time.

If they do read the submissions they can be tired and distracted.

Do you stand out?

If your submission doesn't grab the attention of a committee member then it has no chance of influencing their decision making.

Your members have a right to demand the best possible advocacy efforts from your association and that includes effective committee submissions.

Your submission will be read in-full by the committee secretariat but Members will sometimes have no time to take more than a glance.

Submissions

- Summarise your recommendations up-front

- Use plain English

- Use graphics and use them well

- Use headings

- Write text in columns

- Callout text emphasises important points

Comments by committee members about submissions
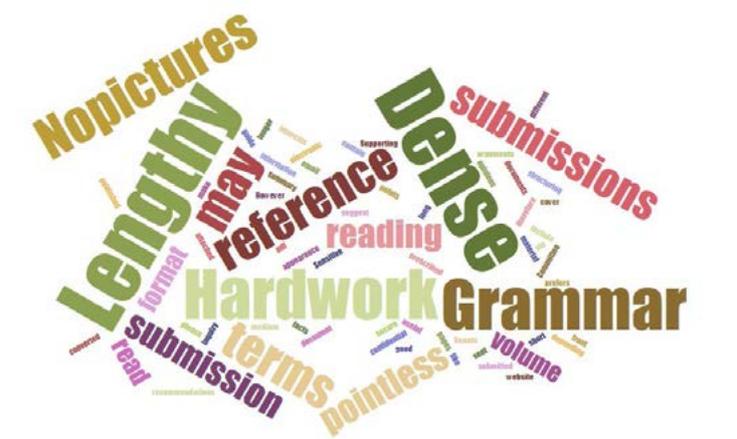
The most common concern is that it is challenging to identify what the authors want because many submissions are dense and lengthy.

How can I tell if my submission will get read?

Does your submission have an executive summary? (It must, even if it is a two page letter.)

Does your submission lead with several pages introducing your association, its members, sponsors and history? (Hint: Don't do this)

Does your submission address the enquiry's terms of reference? (Good)

Does it use the same language as the terms of reference, in the same order? (Better)

Does it detail the benefits of each recommendation? (Don't confuse features with benefits)

Does it use plain English? Not all committee members are experts in your field.

Are graphics simple to understand?

How can I get help?

Call *Parsec Communications* on 0407 180 170 to discuss how to improve your committee submissions.

Nigel Catchlove is the Canberra based Principal Consultant of *Parsec Communications* and has worked as Communications Director for two peak industry associations as well as leading the communications section of a government agency. He has worked as a media adviser for an MP and currently teaches organisations how to make their communications more effective.

Effective communication is not all grammar and spelling. While using plain English is a key aspect of preparing effective submissions, you may learn important tips about layout and graphics that make the readers job easier.

Parsec Communications can audit your current submission templates and recommend changes to make them more effective.

One on one coaching or tailored workshops with key staff can provide a tangible benefit to your members as advocacy outcomes improve.

All Associations employ experts in their fields. Experienced foresters, mechanical engineers, dentists and architects along with the finest scientific minds in the country are not necessarily the best communicators.

Parsec Communications can address that shortfall and give people some tools to improve their writing, along with a change in the way they prepare committee submissions.

What can *Parsec Communications* do for you?

- Audits
- Coaching
- Workshops

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