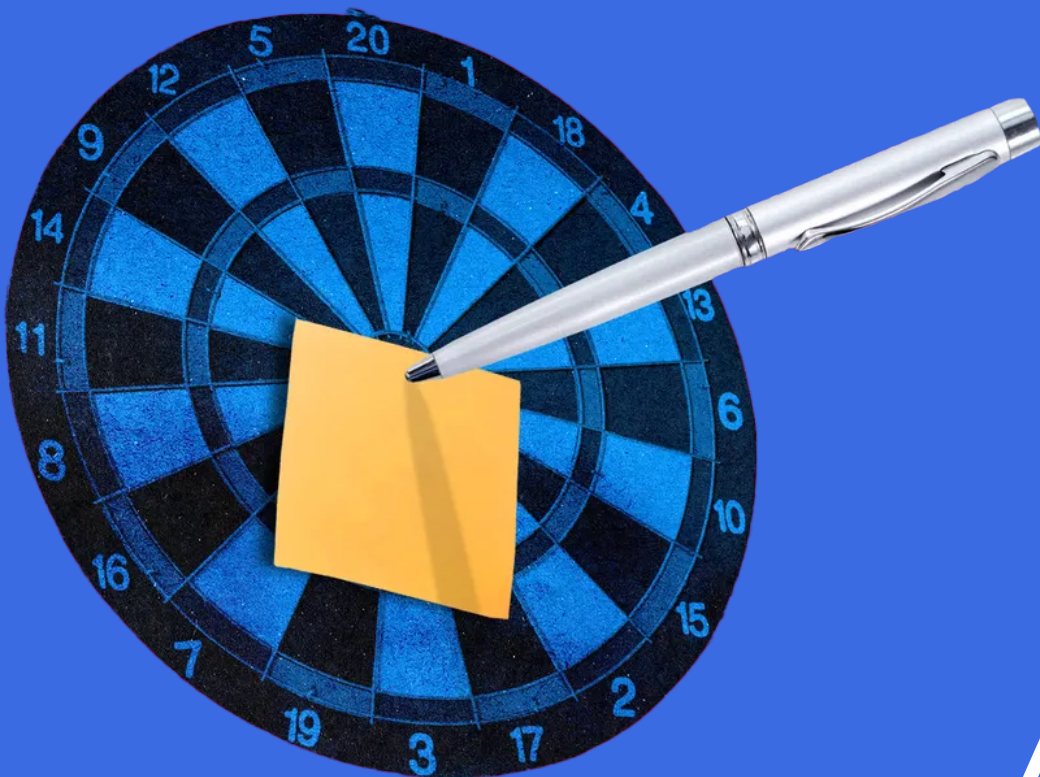


Smart Brevity® 101

How to refine your audience for key internal comms



AXIOS HQ

“Audience first”

Those two words sparked a radical change in our communication strategy at Axios HQ — and inside hundreds of organizations, big and small, that have adopted our Smart Brevity style.

- They’ve helped us refocus our priorities each time we sit down to write, stand up to speak, or plug in to record communications — elevating what our audience needs to know, rather than what we might want to say.

Below, we’ll unpack how we do it, and practice it, too.

How it works

Think about the last time you had lunch with a friend. Conversation was easy. You said something interesting and then — consciously or not — noticed their body language for the rest of the meal. You could tell if their eyes lit up, eager for more. You could see when their attention waned, marking a time to change topics.

These social cues help us navigate conversation and stay engaging. But we lose that feedback loop when we sit behind a screen. It's harder to decide what's an engaging detail or when it's just too much. We try to be everything for everyone — an impossible task — and lose our audience along the way.

Yes, but: There's an approach to audience engagement we call "radiate out," that can serve most of your readers, no matter how big or small the audience. At a high level, you'll need to think through four things:

- State the goal of your communication.
- Decide who your ideal reader would be.
- Name of a real person who fits that profile.
- Let them guide the decisions you make.

That can be a bit of a mind shift, so let's look at two examples.

"Outside-in" communication: Imagine you're watching TV news. When those producers are telling a story, they're thinking about the broadest possible audience they're about to reach. Then they think about the least informed viewer at the edge of that audience.

- They communicate to that outer 5%, sharing all the context, background, and details they need to understand the latest shift or development happening around them.

The other 95% of that audience can still learn something from that story, but it's up to them to sift and search through every single detail to find what's new, ignore what's not, and decipher what they need.

"Radiate out" communication: This is the opposite. In Smart Brevity, we start by picturing our broadest possible audience, too. But then we think about a smart, curious person near the center of that group. Someone who's invested in the topic we're discussing and who will generally engage with what we send.

- We think about who that person is — down to what their name is — and let them guide us on which details are most interesting, urgent, and relevant to them.
- Let's say your person is Ahmed, and you have a dozen updates to share with him today.

With Ahmed now in mind, you'll start to see those updates differently. Maybe only seven or so have a real impact on his work or his day. Elevate them. Just as true, you'll start to see which updates Ahmed already knows — details he's heard recently, information that's common sense. Strike them before you start. They will only dilute the other more pressing updates you've already said he must see.

The big picture: When you write for the core of your audience, rather than the fringe, it creates a powerful ripple effect across readers. If your update is trustworthy, essential, and valuable to Ahmed, then the bands of people around him will want access to that same information, too. Engagement radiates.

The question we hear: What happens when readers who aren't as informed as Ahmed — folks new to your program, organization, or team — get the same communication? They may not be as informed.

The truth we've found: Information is so much more accessible now than it has ever been, and the amount of work it takes for someone to read a story they missed in the news, or catch up on a meeting they weren't in, is often inside of 30 seconds — and they're right back up to speed with everyone else.

Here's the heart of it: Ahmed helps you define what details are essential to share. Your new challenge is how to communicate those details in as conversational of a way as possible. The same words you would use if you were telling Ahmed this update over lunch on the weekend are the same words you should challenge yourself to capture in your communications.

"Write like you speak" is what we say at Axios HQ. The information will intrigue your most sophisticated audience member, and everyone down to a brand new hire can still understand and use it.

That is the power of radiate out — the ability to anticipate and serve the needs of an entire audience, big or small, and keep them engaged with one powerful update.

<p>DEFINE YOUR IDEAL AUDIENCE</p>	<p>Sometimes it can be hard to name your smart, curious reader — especially if you have a broad audience you can't segment and reader knowledge varies. What's key is to pick a priority audience, even though others will read your update, too. Let's look at how a few organizations have thought this through before trying it yourself.</p>		
<p>GLOBAL ENERGY COMPANY</p> <p>Communication: Daily industry news</p> <p>Audience: 10,000+ staff</p> <p>Smart Reader: "Rachel," a senior manager</p> <p>Why it works: Staff no longer need to peruse the news. The day's top stories — internal and external — are all in one place, explaining the business impact each has on its staff and the company's strategic priorities.</p>	<p>MEMBER ASSOCIATION</p> <p>Communication: Bi-weekly policy digests</p> <p>Audience: All members</p> <p>Smart Reader: "Aja," a CEO in the community</p> <p>Why it works: She has a strong network — representing a tier of leader most likely to invite peers to join the association. This update keeps her highly engaged with its policy and advocacy work.</p>	<p>TECHNOLOGY STARTUP</p> <p>Communication: Weekly business update</p> <p>Audience: All-staff</p> <p>Smart Reader: "Martin," a team lead and manager</p> <p>Why it works: Managers are the go-tos for team strategy and priorities. Well equipped, they can make smart in-the-moment decisions that keep their team aligned and drive the business forward.</p>	<p>YOU</p> <p>Communication:</p> <p>Audience:</p> <p>Smart Reader:</p> <p>Why it works:</p>

Go deeper

See how Axios HQ is helping leaders everywhere use Smart Brevity to sharpen their most important workplace communications. [Learn more.](#)

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How to find and refine your target audience