

Smart Brevity® 101

How to make your
point and have it
heard

Smart Brevity is a communication formula Axios has been testing and perfecting for years.

- It was invented in a newsroom — to elevate essential news, explain its impact, and deliver both in a concise and visual format.
- Now hundreds of organizations trust it— to boost engagement with staff, stakeholder, and member updates through a tool called [Axios HQ](#).

The big picture: It works because it's built on brain science. Smart Brevity leans into the modern ways people interact with information, then sets a structure to help make vital updates clearer and more memorable.

Why it matters

We're living in a world with way too many words — emailed, texted, tweeted words — making it harder to find and focus on what matters.

- We check our phones over 200 times a day.
- We decide within 17 milliseconds if we like what we just clicked.
- We spend less than 30 seconds, on average, reading whatever we do.

People have totally changed how they engage with communication — even when it's essential to their jobs. Smart Brevity cuts through, tightening details to what's new and necessary, organizing them in a way that's efficient for an audience, and styling it in a way that's easy to absorb.

👉 **The bottom line:** Most Smart Brevity communications are about 50% shorter than traditional styles — with all the same important substance.

How it works

1. Audience first — always. Before you sit down to write, stand up to speak, or plug in to record, consider three things:

- What is the goal of your communication?
- Who is your ideal reader or listener?
- Who is a real person who fits that profile?

Let that person guide the decisions you make. Keep only what's new, interesting, or urgent to them. Cut anything that's familiar.

[Learn to raise the bar on what readers need.](#)

2. Grab their attention. An effective headline or subject line will make the difference between five clicks and 50,000. Focus on three things:

- Stay under 60 characters — people can read, remember, and repeat it.
- Keep it concrete — people should learn something from it.
- Stay conversational — people will move through it more quickly.

This is your first chance to engage your audience and also your first chance to lose them. [Learn how to craft an effective title or headline.](#)

3. Say “What’s new” and “Why it matters.” Pick the most important detail you want readers to remember. Sum it up in one sentence, then say it first — always. It works because busy readers ask themselves two things when they see new information:

- What is this?
- Is it relevant to me?

The more clearly — and quickly — you answer those questions, the better chance you have at keeping your audience engaged. [Learn to keep an audience hooked.](#)

4. Write like a human. Imagine having coffee with the person you’re trying to reach. The same words you’d say to them are the ones you should write down.

- Studies show short, simple language equates to confidence.
- It’s also easier to consume and more memorable long-term.

You can communicate with the full spectrum of human emotion, sophistication, and nuance in Smart Brevity, while saying it in a simple way. [Learn the power of conversational writing.](#)

5. Stay scannable. Some 60% to 80% of people will scan, not read, long passages of text, University of Maryland research found. But smart styling can break readers out of that fog.

- Short paragraphs, bolding, and bullets get readers farther, faster.
- Simple subject-verb-object sentences and punchy words help, too.

The goal is to be frugal with words — so your end result is shorter and looks approachable even at a quick scan. [Learn a smart way to cut read time.](#)

6. Stop when enough is enough. Use as few words, sentences, and paragraphs as possible. The greatest gift that you can give to yourself — and others — is time. [Learn to radically rethink how you communicate.](#)

👉 **The bottom line:** Smart Brevity is the art of being short, not shallow. If you apply these tips — and reflect on the urgent need for clarity and efficiency — your ideas will break through the noise and be heard.

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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