

HOW TO WRITE A GOOD DOCUMENTARY REPORT

by Arnold H. Webster

*A tree is a tree, is a tree.
Whose it is doesn't matter to me.
But value it true
Is what I must do,
With court-ready testimony.*

The limerick communicates important ideas directly and unmistakably. That's exactly what a good documentary report must do.

Court-ready testimony? Isn't that too much to require for every report, especially a simple, cut-and-dried case? A "simple" case can become a full-blown court case overnight. None of us can predict which case that will be.

The professional way to work is to be prepared for any turn of events by developing an excellent court-ready report. Prepare, on the site, carefully detailed field notes. Submit a polished final report in a distinctive and appropriate folder. Every step between start and finish must contribute to unmistakable communication of important facts.

Reports are made to be read and understood. COMMUNICATION is the name of the game for us.

Who will read your report? Will it be a friendly local attorney accepting your work as part of a deposition? If he sees you have done an excellent job, your report could signal the end of litigation. On the other hand, your documentary report may be exhaustively examined by a battery of sharp and knowledgeable people, including other arborists. Will you squirm uneasily as they search, hoping they will overlook omissions and errors you've made, or will you have submitted solid court-ready testimony? It had better be the latter.

Here's a list of words beginning with "C" that can help you write a court-ready documentary report.

Communicate Clearly, Concisely, Completely, Competently. Buzzing around, looking for a place to be included is another C: **Concentration.** Capture it and never let it go. Without concentration the other C's may fail.

Communication is our goal. Even repetition cannot overemphasize that, but communication does not happen unless our thoughts and facts are presented **Clearly.** Facts have to be stated so clearly that even the most devious attorney can-

not misconstrue what you have written. Simple. Straight forward. Explicit. Unmistakable. Clear. Every statement you write must be all of those, and written in such logical and easy-to-read fashion that a trouble-seeking adversary can't find a chance to create confusion.

Still pursuing clarity for your report, you need to plan not only for the logic of its content, you must organize and present it in a way that any attorney, judge or jury can find the facts quickly.

An outline form is a big help in achieving a clear presentation. Be sure to give each heading and subheading space enough for easy reading. Label every section and subsection in such a way that someone seeing the report for the first time and with no background information could quickly grasp the meaning of your report.

Your outline is a good start toward being **Concise** because in it you make every word count. Choose your words carefully. Avoid gobbledygook words like finalize, prioritize, and even utilize. A simpler, better choice for utilize is the three-letter word, use. Know the definition of every word you use — don't guess. When you have a choice, use the simpler word.

Writing concisely requires you to think precisely, finding the best way to express your thoughts. When you develop that ability, it will give you a professional advantage over many people. It's an advantage worth working for.

Completely is another C to remember in writing a good documentary report. Conciseness that we've just discussed doesn't mean leaving out important points just to make a paragraph shorter, nor does completeness mean using unnecessary words. Your outline form will help you tick off each significant point. With methodic care, you'll include every contributing fact and in its proper place. Use enough simple words to clearly, concisely and completely explain items in your report. Edit, rewrite and polish your report until you know it covers every aspect so completely an attorney can only pause to admire your professionalism.

If you've done that, you've come a long way toward writing your report **Competently.** Now go another step. Read it aloud. You may think that's too much work. Remember the limerick and its emphasis on being court-ready? Can't you im-

agine a lawyer reading an excerpt from your report to a jury? If there's the slightest chance it could be interpreted in his favor, never doubt that an attorney will do it. If you have beat him to it by reading it aloud, or have had someone read it aloud to you, then you are much better prepared. You're confident it'll carry your message.

One more C buzzing around: **Concentration**. It means not only paying strict attention to what you are doing, but it is also keen awareness. Four excellent speakers used that word, awareness, in our 1984 Quebec meeting of ISA. They each stressed its importance in every phase of arboriculture. You and I know it is absolutely essential in every step of the preparation of documentary reports.

Did you catch that word, documentary? Doesn't *documentary* sound important and permanent? It is! Do you fancy having your mistakes documented for future generations in court records? Being acutely and continually aware of the possibility, then concentrating all your efforts toward avoiding mistakes is your goal.

Concentration on every step of every case is a key to making an excellent — not just good — documentary report. Concentration on making

every phase of your work such that it could stand up to courtroom scrutiny will teach you that there never is a time when you can relax your concentration.

Review those important "C's" again. COMMUNICATE: that's what reports must do. Communicate CLEARLY, or you've doomed your case from the start. Communicate clearly and CONCISELY; that means thinking clearly and concisely, an attribute of the best professionals. Communicating clearly, concisely and COMPLETELY will prevent omissions that could destroy your effectiveness. Communicate clearly, concisely, completely, and COMPETENTLY if you intend to excel at report writing. If you don't intend to excel you are not a professional arborist.

CONCENTRATION is our final "C." Without it any part of our work could fail. We also used companion words, CONTINUAL AWARENESS, an attribute that can not only make a better documentary report writer of each of us; awareness will make our work dynamic and vital.

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ABSTRACT

MOLL, G. and D. GANGLOFF. 1984. **Blueprint for spring tree planting**. *Am. Forests* 90(3): 13-16.

For the purposes of this article, we have illustrated a sample yard that allows for many planting options. If you lived in this house, you would probably like to block the view of your northwest neighbor's fence, shed, and compost pile; provide some shade for your patio area; provide privacy from the road; and protect the house from prevailing winter winds. While still in the planning stage, you should also incorporate checklist items into your projects — it just makes sense to get the most from your landscaping, while keeping maintenance to a minimum. With the proper placement of your planting, you can meet all the above needs with just two separate plantings. One directly northwest of the house will hide the neighbor's unsightly yard and at the same time will block your patio from the neighbor's view. A second planting of deciduous shade trees to the south and east of the house will provide for summer shade over the patio area and part of the house.