How to Deliver
The Reader's Bill of "Writes"

Make your document visually appealing.
No one likes paragraphs that are six inches long or written in 8-point type or all boldface capital letters – or all of the above! Single-space within paragraphs; skip a line between paragraphs. Keep paragraphs short – just a few lines long. Generally use a professional-looking 12-point type (Times New Roman, Garamond, New Century Schoolbook, etc. Your 𝓦𝒾𝓃𝓰𝒟𝒾𝓃𝓰 days are over!). With the possible exception of a document from the boss, most readers – including you and me – simply will not read something that looks overwhelming or intimidating.

Provide the purpose of your document at the beginning.
In a memo, you can even do this in the subject line. Otherwise, let the readers know why they should read your document and what they should know or be able to do after reading it.

Provide the most important information first.
You're not John Grisham, teasing your reader on to a grand finale. You're trying to get work done! So give the recommendation, the cost – whatever's most important – first and then fill in the details. Readers generally "cherry-pick" what they need; no one reads the entire document from start to finish.

Use plain English.
Nobody cares how many big words you know or how much jargon you can toss out. Technical language has its place, to be sure, but even an "expert" or "specialized" audience wants simple, clear language. And a non-expert audience will be forever grateful if you can explain a difficult concept so they can understand it without feeling dumb.

It's no big deal when Stephen Hawking can explain where black holes go to a bunch of astro-physicists or Ben Bernanke explains to his buddies at the Fed why a quarter-point reduction is all we need right now to ward off downside risks. But if they can explain it to the rest of us, well, they're great communicators!

Make information accessible.
Again, since no one reads the entire document from start to finish, make it easy for your readers to find what they need by using headings and subheadings, and by keeping paragraphs short.

Use visual aids with discretion.
Visual aids can be enormously helpful – they can save both you and the reader pages and pages of text. But be sure that they are truly useful and that in both the text and the caption that you do more than simply identify the type of information in the visual. Instead, provide the take-away point (some readers look *only* at the pictures, you know!)

And keep the graphics simple! Nobody looks at a three-D pie chart divided into 20 sections, all colored in various shades of blue!

Maintain your credibility.
Edit and proofread carefully; go beyond spellcheck! Keep your tone professional but sincere. Don't exaggerate the good stuff or ignore the bad. Don't use the workplace as a forum for airing your political views or gossiping about a co-worker. Be really careful about using humor; if there's *any* way possible to alienate someone, you will!

B. Pittman