

Answers to “Single Biggest Questions” from KirkMahoney.com Readers

These “SBQs” came to me from KirkMahoney.com readers who had subscribed to my email newsletter. When I got a new SBQ, I put it and my answer to it in a new email message. Those messages got emailed in a then-growing series at a rate of one per week to subscribers. When I switched from email subscription to asking readers to use the KirkMahoney.com RSS feed to get notified about new articles, I collated all of the SBQ messages into the document that you are reading now. For the sake of brevity, I have omitted the email signature after SBQ message #1.

Happy Reading!



Kirk Mahoney

Author, KirkMahoney.com

1. "How do I give effective talks?"
2. "How can we all get along?"
3. "How do I know whether the listener/reader fully understood what I hoped to communicate?"
4. "Nothing at the moment. I find most answers on sites like this."
5. "How to write concisely and get my idea across precisely?"
6. "Why won't my 2,234,232,232 thoughts come out eloquently in the perfect order?"
7. "How do I make this [learning English] a part of my daily routine?"
8. "How can I make it?"
9. "What is happening to the use of hyphens in compound adjectives and nouns? I see many inconsistencies in their use and non-use (example right there!). Will they ultimately disappear?"
10. "Should red fruited (or similar) be hyphenated if not before a noun eg This wine is red fruited."
11. "How do you determine what readers need to see, what listeners need to hear, and what they don't?"

12. "What is the best way to teach fanboys and AAWWUBBIS to my students?"
13. "How can I efficiently train myself to improve my writing and communication skills?"
14. "summary in note making, is it all that relevant?"
15. "How do I improve my English?"
16. "What is necessary to come across as sincere?"
17. "How do I get to the point without being too brusque?"
18. "When can I work for fun and not for money?"
19. "How [do I] convey more with less?"
20. "When is it better to use a comma instead of a semicolon?"
21. "IS there a means by which to convince users of language [ahem] that communication is a HUGE factor in problem solving and coming to an understanding, even with those you don't agree with?"
22. "What's the best style guide to follow?"
23. "How do I structure my communication with people of different education, socio-economic, regional and cultural differences?"

SBQ #1

KirkMahoney.com Readers Club members like you have shared with me their Single Biggest Questions ("SBQs") related to communication.

As a thank-you for being one of my Club members, I will email to you each week my answer to one of these SBQs. Each message will be ad-free, concise, and smartphone-friendly.

SBQ #1 comes from a member whose single biggest fear is giving the wrong information. Her single biggest frustration is audiences not listening, the result of which she gets nervous and assumes that her topic is not interesting. Trying to make her presentations more interesting -- e.g., with slides -- has not worked. Her ideal solution would enable her to speak with confidence.

Single Biggest Question: "How do I give effective talks?"

Answer: I recommend the "Improve Your Speaking" chapter in my free ebook *Improve Your Communication*. You can download a copy from the page that appears when you click the "**Update your profile.**" link at the bottom of any of these email messages.

You should have gotten your download passwords in my "Welcome" email message to you. Here they are again for your convenience:

Improve Your Communication ebook

- EPUB password: [guaamixv](#) -- *Kobo or Nook*
- MOBI password: [nhz7q3rj](#) -- *Kindle*

[Now you can download the EPUB [here](#) without a password.]

[Now you can download the MOBI [here](#) without a password.]

To your success,



Kirk Mahoney

Author, KirkMahoney.com

SBQ #2

Single Biggest Question ("SBQ") #2 comes from a KirkMahoney.com Readers Club member whose single biggest fear is not being able to communicate properly. Her single biggest fear is that she is not always understood, the result of which is that she feels stress. She is unsure what hasn't worked, and her ideal solution is to be perfect.

Single Biggest Question: "How can we all get along?"

Answer: I assume by your SBQ that you are asking how can we all communicate better. I recommend my free ebook ***Improve Your Communication***. You can download a copy from the page that appears when you click the "**Update your profile.**" link at the bottom of any of these email messages.

You should have gotten your download passwords in my "Welcome" email message to you. Here they are again for your convenience:

Improve Your Communication ebook

- EPUB password: [guaamixv](#) -- *Kobo or Nook*
- MOBI password: [nhz7q3rj](#) -- *Kindle*

[Now you can download the EPUB [here](#) without a password.]

[Now you can download the MOBI [here](#) without a password.]

SBQ #3

SBQ #3 came from a KirkMahoney.com Readers Club member whose single biggest fear is being misunderstood in her intent. Her single biggest frustration is dealing with people who do not have a large vocabulary. The result of this frustration is that she feels as if she "over-speaks" to others. What hasn't worked for her is "over-using" words. Her ideal solution would empower her to help others to learn more.

Single Biggest Question: "How do I know whether the listener/reader fully understood what I hoped to communicate?"

Answer: I recommend what I call the "CIA method" of communication. Do not let your audience simply nod or say "Uh-huh." or put a "Thanks!" in an email response. Instead, prompt your audience with questions that let you test whether they heard/read what you said/wrote. I talk about this more in my free ebook *Improve Your Communication*. You can download a copy from the page that appears when you click the "**Update your profile.**" link at the bottom of any of these email messages.

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Improve Your Communication ebook

- EPUB password: [guaamixv](#) -- Kobo or Nook
- MOBI password: [nhz7q3rj](#) -- Kindle

[Now you can download the EPUB [here](#) without a password.]

[Now you can download the MOBI [here](#) without a password.]

SBQ #4

SBQ #4 came from a KirkMahoney.com Readers Club member whose single biggest fear is getting comments on her blog that correct her English, given that she is not a native-English speaker. Her single biggest frustration is people who focus on how she writes and not on what she writes. The result of this frustration is that she wastes "too much time" checking and double-checking her words but still misses some mistakes. What hasn't worked for her is using specific dictionaries. Her ideal solution is a cheap service to review her blog.

Single Biggest Question: "Nothing at the moment. I find most answers on sites like this."

Answer: I have two recommendations:

1. Keep looking for answers on sites such as KirkMahoney.com.
2. Find a native-English blogger who writes about your topic, too. Offer to trade editing of each other's blog posts (before they get posted). The native-English blogger can help you with your English. You can help him or her with content.
3. Look on a site such as Guru.com, oDesk.com, or eLance.com for a contract editor who is a native-English speaker.

SBQ #5

SBQ #5 came from a KirkMahoney.com Readers Club member whose single biggest fear is doubting whether her wording is correct, given that she is not a native-English speaker. Her single biggest frustration is that it takes time to check her doubts. The result of this frustration is that she is "a slow writer" and "sounds diffident" when she is speaking English. To her, what hasn't worked is reading and imitating a lot. Her ideal solution is unclear to her; she is still in the process of exploration.

Single Biggest Question: "How to write concisely and get my idea across precisely?"

Answer: I highly recommend **Hemingway App**. You can use the free version online, and you can buy the client version -- for Mac or PC -- for just a few dollars. I now use the client version for my writing, including when I am revising one of my books.

SBQ #6

SBQ #6 came from a KirkMahoney.com Readers Club member whose single biggest fear and frustration are having words come out tangled and looking like an idiot. "Looking like an idiot" is the result of this frustration. What hasn't worked is feeling like an idiot. "To open my mouth and have all my 2,234,232,232 thoughts come out eloquently in the perfect order" is the ideal solution.

Single Biggest Question: "Why won't my 2,234,232,232 thoughts come out eloquently in the perfect order?"

Answer: I recommend expressing the ONE thought that you would want to express in the event that you knew that you had only a few minutes to express anything.

If you are speaking with someone, then let the other person respond, and then respond to that response. Continue the conversation in that way until you reach the end of that conversational thread. Then start the process again with your NEXT thought.

If you are writing, then dwell on and expand your initial expression before you start to express your next thought in writing.

SBQ #7

SBQ #7 came from a KirkMahoney.com Readers Club member whose single biggest fear is not being able to express thoughts in correct English and whose single biggest frustration is limited vocabulary. "Mumbling" is the result of this frustration. What hasn't worked is trying to learn English via a course. The ideal solution is still not obvious to this member.

Single Biggest Question: "How do I make this [learning English] a part of my daily routine?"

Answer: I recommend two steps.

1. Find an online language-learning service. LiveMocha.com was a good one, but it has closed. See whether you can find one similar to LiveMocha, with the ability to chat online with other language learners.
2. Put language learning on your daily calendar as an appointment that you must keep.

SBQ #8

SBQ #8 came from a KirkMahoney.com Readers Club member whose single biggest fear is to be misunderstood and whose single biggest frustration is when people do not treat her seriously. Sadness is the result of this frustration. She says that she is not fluent in English and that her pronunciation has not worked well for her. Her ideal solution would let her "stay in touch" with the English language.

Single Biggest Question: "How can I make it?"

Answer: Because the Portuguese infinitive "fazer" means both "to make" and "to do", I will infer that she meant to ask, "How can I do it?" That is, she asked how she can "stay in touch" with the English language. As with my answer to SBQ #7, I recommend two steps.

1. Find an online language-learning service. LiveMocha.com was a good one, but it has closed. See whether you can find one similar to LiveMocha, with the ability to chat online with other language learners.

2. Put language learning on your daily calendar as an appointment that you must keep.

SBQ #9

SBQ #9 came from a KirkMahoney.com Readers Club member whose single biggest fear is being seen as a bad speller and whose single biggest frustration is when people dumb down her writing for sales materials. A lot of "boring, bad" business writing is the result of this frustration. She says that trying to writing interesting, catchy ledes in marketing materials has not worked for her. "Better education for the masses?" would be her ideal solution.

Single Biggest Question: "What is happening to the use of hyphens in compound adjectives and nouns? I see many inconsistencies in their use and non-use (example right there!). Will they ultimately disappear?"

Answer: You raise an interesting SBQ. I don't know the answer, but here is my "non-answer" answer.

When I studied German in college, I don't recall seeing hyphens used as a way to create compound words. When I studied Swedish and Norwegian for a bit on my own, I saw a similar pattern to that of German -- simply putting all the words together to create a new word -- with no hyphenation.

My wife was born in a British colony, then moved to England, then moved to Canada, and then moved to Texas. She and I often compare notes about hyphenation. The British approach seems to continue to favor hyphenation, the American approach seems to favor the German/Nordic-languages approach, and the Canadian approach to hyphenation seems to be somewhere between the British and American approaches.

SBQ #10

SBQ #10 came from a KirkMahoney.com Readers Club member whose single biggest fear is Alzheimer's and whose single biggest frustration is hyphens. The result of this frustration is that she bought *How to Use Hyphens*. She says that what hasn't worked is one question that is not answered in the book. Her ideal solution is that I know the answer.

Single Biggest Question: "Should red fruited (or similar) be hyphenated if not before a noun eg This wine is red fruited."

Answer: Yes.

Let me start by saying that I assume that "red-fruited" is a way to describe some wines. It does not make sense to me, but I assume that it makes sense to wine connoisseurs. In other words, I assume that we are not referring to a wine that is red and "fruited" (whatever that would mean) and instead are referring to a red-fruited wine.

We are using "red-fruited" as a modifier of the noun *wine*, just as we would use "red" or "white" as a modifier of the noun *wine* ... and just as we would use "rose-colored" as a modifier of the noun *glasses*.

Just as we can write "The rose-colored glasses are free." or "The free glasses are rose-colored.", we can write "The red-fruited wine is good." or "The good wine is red-fruited." as well.

A hyphen unites "rose" and "colored" to express to the reader that the words together modify the noun *glasses*. Similarly, a hyphen unites "red" and "fruited" to express to the reader that the words together modify the noun *wine*.

SBQ #11

SBQ #11 came from a KirkMahoney.com Readers Club member whose single biggest fear is not being objective enough to understand what readers see and what listeners hear. His single biggest frustration is not remembering words and names that he does not use often. The result of this frustration is that he believes that he does not communicate well. He says that what hasn't worked is repeating people's names in his head after he meets them. His ideal solution is being able to remember words and names that he does not use often, although he says that a thesaurus works well for the former.

Single Biggest Question: "How do you determine what readers need to see, what listeners need to hear, and what they don't?"

Answer:

Let me start by addressing your "What Hasn't Worked" item. I use it sometimes, but I am not a big fan of internal repetition. (a) It can become boring. (b) It distracts me from my conversation with the person whom I just met. I recommend that you try these approaches instead:

1. **Focus on one new person at a time.** This is not easy in a crowd of new people (at, say, a party). But, it has the added benefit of making each new person feel special because of your undivided attention.
2. **Use the new person's name repeatedly in the conversation.** This will feel awkward at first -- as if you were going overboard to impress him or her. But, people like to hear their own names. Plus, if you are with someone else, try introducing the new person by name. You need not always say the new person's name directly to him or her (in the second person). Instead, using the new person's name in the third person can make your repeated vocalization less obvious.
3. **Associate the new person's name with an action, another person, or an object.** For example, imagine patting the head of a new person whose name is Pat. Or, imagine a friend named Jim when you meet a new person whose name is Jim. Or, imagine a utility bill after meeting a new person whose name is Bill.

Now let me answer your SBQ. The short answer is that you have to learn who your audience is. That can be tricky with a larger audience. What audience members need could be quite varied. Your SBQ also hints at the "VAK" concept - that some prefer visual communication (V), that some prefer auditory communication (A), and that some prefer kinesthetic (K) communication. I recommend that you try these approaches:

1. **If the audience is in front of you** (or on the telephone or a webinar with you), **then ask questions as you go.** Pause often to ask audience members for their questions or concerns or for them to put into words what you have presented.
2. **If the audience is NOT in front of you, then tell a story.** This will let you reach V, A, and K people. I recommend the book *Sell with a Story*. We all sell, so you don't have to see yourself as a salesperson to get value from this book. As the author says, "Stories speak to the part of the brain where decisions are made." The author has a website with downloadable guides that support what he teaches in the book. Check it out!

SBQ #12

SBQ #12 came from a KirkMahoney.com Readers Club member whose single biggest fear is dying without publishing his book. His single biggest frustration is not finding time to start, work on, and finish his book. The result of this frustration is more frustration. He says that "beating myself up" hasn't worked. His ideal solution would involve time management.

Single Biggest Question: "What is the best way to teach fanboys and AAWWUBBIS to my students?"

Answer: I had heard of "fanboys" but had never heard of "AAWWUBBIS" when I got this SBQ. I then realized that "FANBOYS" is an acronym as well as an all-caps way to refer to male fans of comics, music, movies, or science fiction.

- "FANBOYS" refers to the conjunctions for, and, nor, but, or, yet, & so. [Here](#) is one tutorial that might help.
- "AAWWUBBIS" refers to after, although, as, when, while, until, before, because, if, & since. [Here](#) is a slideshow that might help.

I like the "FANBOYS" acronym. I like acronyms for learning certain topics.

In contrast, I'm not a fan of the "AAWWUBBIS" initialism.

When I studied German in college, we did not get acronyms or initialisms for learning prepositions, etc. Instead, we simply memorized alphabetized strings of words such as "durch / für / gegen / ohne / um" and "aus / außer / bei / mit / nach / seit / von / zu".

Similarly, when I later studied Spanish in continuing-education classes, we simply memorized "a / ante / bajo / cabe / con / contra / de / desde / en / entre / hacia / hasta / para / por / según / sin / so / sobre / tras".

Bottom Line: If an initialism or acronym does not help students to learn a topic, then try something else.

SBQ #13

SBQ #13 came from a KirkMahoney.com Readers Club member whose single biggest fear is poor writing skills that cause him to look foolish or say something different from what he means. His single biggest frustration is inability to catch on to simple grammar mistakes in his writing. The result of this frustration is fewer

publications. Regarding what hasn't worked, he says, "I honestly haven't made a commitment to practice these skills." His ideal solution is a tool that he could use for approximately 20 minutes each day that would help him improve his grammar knowledge and skills.

Single Biggest Question: "How can I efficiently train myself to improve my writing and communication skills?"

Answer: Search for "improve your English grammar daily" at Google. There are several promising sites in the first two or three pages of search results.

To strengthen your commitment to daily practice, check out *[Willpower: 62 Self-Control and Discipline Techniques for More Happiness in Your Life](#)*.

SBQ #14

SBQ #14 came from a KirkMahoney.com Readers Club member whose single biggest fear is making constructional errors in communication. His single biggest frustration occurs when he is communicating with many people. The result of this frustration is that these persons often throw their questions at him. "My grammar" is his answer as to what hasn't worked. His ideal solution would be something that would help him to better construct his words.

Single Biggest Question: "summary in note making, is it all that relevant?"

Answer: If I understood the question correctly, then I believe that you are asking about the relevance of writing a summary after taking notes. If this was your question, then, yes, I would recommend summarizing one's notes. Summarizing forces you to consider patterns and to look for conclusions or at least hypotheses to test.

SBQ #15

SBQ #15 came from a KirkMahoney.com Readers Club member whose single biggest fear, as well as single biggest frustration, is grammar. The result of this frustration is always being confused. Nothing has worked. His ideal solution would be more learning.

Single Biggest Question: "How do I improve my English?"

Answer: Continue to study English. Continue to expose yourself to English-language audio and video content. Find opportunities to practice English. If you have a friend whose native language is English, ask him or her to correct your

spoken English occasionally. Do not ask for constant correction; this is not fair to your friend.

SBQ #16

SBQ #16 came from a KirkMahoney.com Readers Club member whose single biggest fear is ridicule and whose single biggest frustration is misinterpretation. The result of this frustration is hurt feelings, hits to fragile egos, etc. Nothing has worked. His ideal solution is to wake up as an extrovert.

Single Biggest Question: "What is necessary to come across as sincere?"

Answer: Here are five suggestions:

1. Speak and write in plain English.
 2. Dare to tell stories about yourself that are self-deprecating.
 3. When talking with someone, use the 2:1 rule (2 ears to 1 mouth): listen twice as much as you speak.
 4. Let the other person in a conversation "unload" what is in his or her mind before you unload what is in your mind.
 5. When appropriate, ask the other person in a conversation to put into his/her words what you said.
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SBQ #17

SBQ #17 came from a KirkMahoney.com Readers Club member whose single biggest fear is saying something that he should not say. His single biggest frustration is overly florid communication, the result of which is losing people. What hasn't worked is thinking over his words, which leads to drawn-out communication that is more confusing. His ideal solution would be to have his speech "and thus writing" more concise.

Single Biggest Question: "How do I get to the point without being too brusque?"

Answer: Try the Hemingway app. I used it when I wrote my previous few books. And, I use it when writing articles. My use of it has made my speech more to-the-point, too.

SBQ #18

SBQ #18 came from a KirkMahoney.com Readers Club member whose single biggest fear is "rats and cockroaches"; she does not seem to have a fear of making mistakes with communication. Her single biggest frustration is challenges with prioritizing, the result of which is "frenetic scrambles at the last minute" -- feeling that she has not done her best. What hasn't worked is "calendar/white boards/coaching/you name it". Her ideal solution would be to have someone sit next to her and tell her what to do all day long -- a "Kind gentle enthusiastic onsite cheerleader".

Single Biggest Question: "When can I work for fun and not for money?"

Answer: You can do that when you have enough passive income to replace the income from your job. I assume, though, that you also want me to address your single biggest frustration and what hasn't worked for you. To improve your ability to prioritize, try putting the biggest task at the start of your day. Leave other tasks for when you have less energy. For example, if you often write as part of your job, then write at the start of your day, and delay non-writing tasks until later in the day.

SBQ #19

SBQ #19 came from a KirkMahoney.com Readers Club member whose single biggest fear is being "unable to clearly communicate my point across". Her single biggest frustration is "using too many words and [being] unable to be precise", the result of which is using yet more words. What hasn't worked is "self help"; her ideal solution is practice.

Single Biggest Question: "How [do I] convey more with less?"

Answer: You must know your audience. Which words you choose should depend on your audience. Learn to choose your words carefully. Ten-year-olds have a simpler vocabulary than university students should have. Consult a thesaurus for synonyms for a word that you are considering. Use the **Hemingway app** to identify phrases that have simpler alternatives.

SBQ #20

SBQ #20 came from a KirkMahoney.com Readers Club member whose single biggest fear is "people saying yes to the question 'do you mind if...'" when in reality they mean that no, they in fact, do not mind". Her single biggest frustration is "people using huge words just because they want to look smart, but they use them wrong and it makes them look idiotic", the result of which is "rewriting entire

essays for other people... oops". What hasn't worked is "trying to explain to these people that they can stick to words and phrases they already know"; her ideal solution is "that they stop!".

Single Biggest Question: "When is it better to use a comma instead of a semicolon?"

Answer:

If you are combining two sentences with a conjunction (such as "and"), then use a comma (and a space) before the conjunction.

- *He went to the grocery store, and she went to the hardware store.*

If you are combining two sentences without a conjunction, then use a semicolon (and a space) before the second sentence (the start of which should not be capitalized unless the first word would otherwise be capitalized).

- *He went to the grocery store; she went to the hardware store.*

If you use a colon to terminate your introduction to a list, then use semicolons to separate the items in the list.

- *Here are the automobile manufacturers who will be at the convention: Ford; General Motors; Fiat Chrysler.*

If you don't use a colon to terminate your introduction to a list, then use commas to separate the items in the list.

- *My favorite colors are red, green, and blue.*

SBQ #21

SBQ #21 came from a KirkMahoney.com Readers Club member whose single biggest fear is that "far too few even CARE that communication could be improved". Her single biggest frustration is "the seemingly constant change in how speaking and writing are to be done - properly". As a result of this frustration, she wrote, "I know I have grown lax. I certainly don't remember all the 'rules' - surely no one remembers them ALL, but the simplest things elude me sometimes. I don't wish to communicate well with the small handful of people who DO care; I want to see everyone." She wrote that what hasn't worked is, "Reasoning - something that SHOULD have some positive effect just doesn't

anymore." Her ideal solution? "The whole 'dumbing down' agenda would DIE and the reverse take place! I always loved the Reader's Digest 'Enrich Your Vocabulary' and other related offerings."

Single Biggest Question: "IS there a means by which to convince users of language [ahem] that communication is a HUGE factor in problem solving and coming to an understanding, even with those you don't agree with?"

Answer:

Here are three possible answers:

1. Teachers and parents start to hold children responsible for clear communication.
2. Employers, including school administrators, start to hold employees responsible for clear communication.
3. We keep challenging people who are not communicating clearly.

#3 applies to everyone who cares about clear communication. Here is an example from my own life: I call out poor communication in books that I am reviewing at Goodreads.com. For example, if an author writes "reflect back" in a book, then I point out in my book review that the "re" in "reflect" means "back" and therefore that "reflect back" should have been "reflect" in the book.

SBQ #22

SBQ #22 came from a KirkMahoney.com Readers Club member whose single biggest fear is "Making mistakes and therefore my message gets lost due to appearing stupid". Her single biggest frustration is "Getting over that fear". As a result of this frustration, she wrote, "It can take me awhile to write." She wrote that what hasn't worked is, "Letting that fear take the lead." Her ideal solution? "Reading a lot, looking things up, keep trying."

Single Biggest Question: "What's the best style guide to follow?"

Answer:

If you are writing for an employer, then ask your employer.

If you are writing for a journal or magazine or newspaper, then ask the editor.

If you are writing for a book publisher, then ask the publishing company.

If you are self-publishing in any way, then look at a handful and follow your preference.

SBQ #23

SBQ #23 came from a KirkMahoney.com Readers Club member whose single biggest fear is "Presenting an image that I am uneducated". Her single biggest frustration is "Pronouncing words incorrectly (libary v. libRary)". "Arguments with my daughter" were the result of this frustration. "Constant reminders" have not worked. "She comes to the conclusion herself" was her ideal solution.

Single Biggest Question: "How do I structure my communication with people of different education, socio-economic, regional and cultural differences?"

Answer:

If you are speaking with an individual, then ask your listener to tell you what he or she heard you say. As speaker, writer, and radio talk-show host Dennis Prager advises for one-on-one conversations, say no more than three sentences before pausing to let the listener respond. Here are some examples of non-threatening ways to ask whether your listener understood you:

- "Who is someone for whom this might work?"
- "What have you seen like this in your experience?"
- "Where would this apply to your life | in your job | with your friends?"
- "When would this make sense to you?"
- "Why would this not make sense in your situation?"
- "How would you put what I just said?"

If you are speaking to a group, then do not overestimate each audience member's knowledge of your topic. Instead, ask for a show of hands some questions about their current jobs, their current marital status, whether they are familiar with a term or news story, or whatever applies to your speech. Follow these questions with "I hope that you will indulge me while I make sure that we are all on the same page." or a similar statement, before you fill the knowledge gaps and continue with your speech.

If you are writing an email message, then put only one topic in the body and a non-threatening question about that topic in the subject line.

If you are writing a text message, then write only one or two statements followed by a non-threatening question.

If you are writing anything else, then study your target audience first and then have an "avatar" of that audience in mind as you write to that avatar.

No matter what, never underestimate your audience's intelligence.
