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## Test your Part 2 brochure draft on a few clients, professor advises

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After you type that final period into your Form ADV, Part 2 brochure, assemble a focus group of 3-4 clients and ask for their feedback.

"Test the document with members of the intended readership," suggests **Deborah Bosley**, an associate professor of English at the **University of North Carolina** at Charlotte. "That will flag where people have problems understanding."

You could hold a group meeting or individually work with each tester, prepare questions in advance - such as where is our investment strategy explained or point out the name of our CEO - to test the brochure's usability, hand each client the brochure and ask her to circle words or phrases she doesn't understand, Bosley recommends.

### Understanding 'plain English'

Many advisers fret over the ability to write in plain English. There are common, agreed-upon elements of the style: write in an active voice with strong verbs, use personal pronouns, remove unclear language and jargon, keep sentences short and pay attention to document design ([IA Watch](#), Aug. 9, 2010).

Some advisers will reach the conclusion of **Jill Dildine**, controller/CCO at **Pacific Financial Group** (\$325M in AUM) in Bellevue, Wash. She estimated it would take three weeks to rewrite her firm's brochure, multiplied her hourly salary by all those days

and her cost-benefit equation attested to the wisdom of hiring a vendor for the task. She went with a firm she had engaged in the past for other jobs.

Dildine recommends that if you too seek a vendor, do it now. "They will up their price because they can" as the brochure deadline approaches after the first of the year. In her case, Dildine's vendor will deliver its draft by year's end, when she will edit it to conclusion.

Other advisers will take on the extra labor. **Luellen Lockwood**, COO/CCO of **Retirement Asset Management** (\$151M in AUM), also in Bellevue, Wash., took a class to help her master plain-English writing before she begins composing her firm's brochure. She aims to avoid Times Roman for more contemporary fonts and to bump up the text size. Her tip: "You've got to invest the time to read" the **SEC's** [final rule](#) to understand what to do.

Another idea: Look at brochures directed at patients in doctors' offices, recommends Lockwood's instructor, **Holly Lawrence**, director of the business communication program at the **University of Massachusetts** in Amherst. The health brochures are designed to convey complex medical concepts to readers of all stripes, just as you must communicate challenging topics to the investing public.

You also could read text books that aspire to translate complex topics simply, or escape your comfort zone to read materials prepared for teaching new professionals in another field. They also can show you how to express sophisticated concepts simply, notes Lawrence.

She counsels her students to make writing "inviting." Think of those disclosures that come with your credit card statement, written in a teeny font on small paper, they're as far as you can get from inviting.

### **Slimming to skim**

Instead write with "skim value," says Lawrence. Use pictures, headings, "strategic whitespace to give the eyes a break," bullets, bold text and other design elements that allow "the reader to take in the information quickly and easily ... and then make decisions about what he or she wants to read more of," she continues. "It's so easy to fall back into that legalese writing," confesses

Lockwood. Resist the temptation by forcing yourself to envision the end reader.

Other aids include to walk away from the text for a day or two. When you return, re-read what you've written and improvements will jump forth. Also, look to see what other firms have written in their brochures but don't plagiarize, warns Lawrence.

The information contained herein was current as of the publication date.