To: N. Jones

From: J. Basden

Subject: Situational and Style Analysis of the Bigtown Housing Authority (BHA) Handbook

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# Introduction

This memo discusses the situational analysis for users who will read the BHA handbook by considering how the document will be used and handled, the ideal document layout, and the user’s pre-existing knowledge. This memo also discusses the style analysis for the document including sentence structure and length, writer’s tone, and verb and noun choices. The situational analysis and style analysis will provide the groundwork for a comprehensive edit of the document.

# Situational Analysis

The document is part of a handbook that informs tenants of the BHA of the rules and regulations they must follow while living at the public housing facility. The rules and regulations are designed to help the tenants live together harmoniously and to preserve the property of the BHA and the tenants will be looking to use this document to learn new information instead of the referring to the cluttered lease. The modular nature of the information means the document needs an obvious hierarchy that lets the user easily scan the document for the needed information and easily identify extremely important information, a structure that contrasts with the much more formal and technical lease where the information is buried in large paragraphs. The modular organization of the information also means the document will be referenced and then filed away often so it will need a suitable left margin for three-hole punching if used in a paper format. Also, where appropriate, the document can be hyperlinked for computer use so the reader can quickly jump to related information that appears in a separate section. My editing of the document will assume that the user knows the basics of renting an apartment and will not discuss basic terms such as the lease or the security deposit; however, the document will need to include references encouraging the user to contact the apartment manager with any questions in case the user is unfamiliar with any terms in the document. The primary user of the document is the tenants, but the document may also be used by BHA staff to inform themselves of the BHA’s policies.

# Style Analysis

One style issue of the document is the varied subjects that the writer uses, an issue that takes away from the document’s cohesion and coherence. First, the author alternates between referring directly to the reader as the subject of the sentence in third person and second person, causing an unprofessional tone. Second, the other subjects of sentences change frequently. For example, the Special Charges section fails to stick to a couple of concrete subjects and instead switches between different subjects like the BHA, schedule, charges, and employees. The document also lacks consistency in punctuation. An example of this is when the handbook uses the acronym BHA yet also uses B.H.A. and alternates between capitalizing dwelling unit and using lowercase.

A second style issue is poor sentence structure. The document uses nominalizations that cause weak subject/verb pairs. For example, the use of the word “verification” in the Will my Rent Amount Ever Change? section causes ambiguity of who will verify family income. Also, the document uses unnecessary words like “from time to time” that make the prose less concise. The use of the passive voice in the document also causes poor sentence structure, leading to the doers of the sentences to become ambiguous or lost. Finally, many important pieces of information are buried in relative and subordinate clauses. The majority of the sentences will need to avoid being lengthy and use basic language and terms because the users will be tenants of public housing and their education level may be lower because of their lower income.

The layout of the document also needs to be changed. The document uses excessive and inconsistent capitalization and excessive and random bolding that causes distracting document noise and gives the document a commanding, disorganized tone. For example, an entire sentence is capitalized in the Security Deposits section and the Extra Charges section heading is not bolded like the rest of the second level section headings. Furthermore, the section headings of all levels appear in nearly the same size and font causing no obvious hierarchy to the document, and every first level heading fails to be written in the form of a question. Finally, extremely important information appears embedded with other information causing difficulty for the user to find these bits of information.

The writer’s persona, created by word choices and punctuation, is a bit too commanding and needs to change to more of a cordial tone. In order to achieve a cordial tone, the subjects and agents of the sentences should directly reference the user by using the second person, so the user will feel like they are being spoken to instead of vaguely referenced. The purpose of the document is to assist tenants and make their stay at the BHA housing facility as pleasant as possible while preserving BHA property so the style and ethos of the prose needs to fit this purpose. Finally, the document is a bit vague at times like failing to explain what a “good neighbor” is so I will use queries to the author where this happens to address the occurrence.

I am happy to conduct a comprehensive edit to the document; also, please let me know if you have any questions or concerns.

Sincerely,

Jaret Basden