



Writing
Global
Documents

Universally Appealing

Lost in translation.

William Shakespeare once eloquently wrote,
*“What’s in a name? That which we call a rose
By any other name would smell as sweet...”*

On a purely poetic and olfactory level, Old Bill hit the emotional nail on the head. But in the field of international communications, he would have missed the boat.

Translating the word “rose” even slightly wrong in a different language could result in a loss of all meaning and even be construed as offensive—and that wouldn't be so sweet. So how do you address everyone worldwide and lose nothing in translation?

With a culture-neutral, global document.



It's not like writing Shakespeare.

A culture-neutral, global document must ensure the consistency of your message in all languages.
A global document is one that works well in any culture and takes less time and money to translate.



Get critical.

Creating global documents takes a willingness to look critically at every paragraph, every sentence and every word. Here are some basic tips that should help you get you started.

Use terminology consistently.

Whenever possible, use a single term for a single concept. Terms used interchangeably in English often have completely different meanings and connotations in other languages.

Keep it clear and simple.

Make sure that your text is explicit and grammatically correct. Maintain a style of language that is naturally spoken.

Avoid noun strings.

Used commonly in English, they are extremely difficult to translate. Example: High speed memory user program database.

Avoid abbreviations and acronyms.

The translated expansion may not look anything like the short form in English. Never create an acronym in the target language.

Avoid puns.

Based on uniquely English sound values, or the meanings of English words, they rarely translate well.

Be wary of idioms and metaphors.

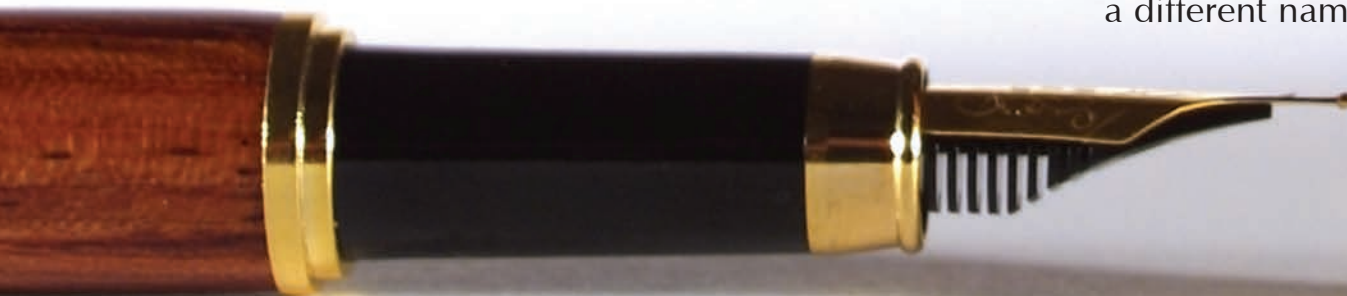
The suggestion that someone “talk turkey” or reference to “a bull market” can confuse and alienate a reader.

Avoid proverbs and humor.

They are very difficult to translate. There is usually no equivalent for them in other languages.

Avoid specific product recommendations.

These products may not be available overseas. If they are, they may be sold under a different name.



Plan for measurements.

Most of the world uses the metric system. The decimal comma is the standard in many countries, instead of a period. Using non-metric data, with only a decimal period, or a decimal comma, could potentially lead to serious error.

Consider the degree of precision required when American system measurements are converted into metric. When something should be three feet long, you may not want to say that it is 0.9144 meters.

Avoid references to 800 telephone numbers.

800-based toll-free numbers are not free to callers outside of North America.

Avoid local standards.

References to local standards (EPA, ANSI, UL, etc.) may not apply in target countries.

Use articles.

Technical writers often eliminate “a,” “an,” and “the” to make text concise. However, often these articles are critical to clarifying ambiguous sentences.

Use specific, explicit terms in procedure statements.

Generalities often do not clearly explain what is to be done. Example: Ambiguous, “Move the handle.”
More specific, “Pull down the handle.”

Use care when referring to other publications.

If the referenced publication’s title has been translated, the exact translated title should be used.

Be careful with date and time references.

In Europe the date 6/7/05 means July 6, not June 7, 2005. Because military time (24-hour clock) is common in most European countries, one cannot be certain that 3:00 pm will be universally understood.



Culturally sensitive.

Following these simple guidelines, prior to writing your document, will save both time and money in the translation process.

We'll show you how we can bring a world of language management opportunity to your company.



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