

How to Write Clearly and Concisely for the Best Results

Effective leaders don't just light up the way by their spoken words. They also write to inspire and instruct, educate, and motivate their followers.

- How effective is your business writing at motivating your work group?
- Do your documents clearly support your organization's vision and mission?
- Can you deliver clear, concise written instructions that can be easily understood?
- Can you break down issues, projects, and initiatives in your reports to help employees understand and support them?
- Do your emails clarify or confuse? Do they generate understanding or uncertainty? Do they help you or haunt you down the road?

It pays to increase your ability to write effective emails, crisp reports, and persuasive memos. Your written as well as your spoken word can enhance your credibility and leadership.

Your Message Informs Your Media

Long before you publish, you want to determine what your message is, whom it's intended for, and what results you want. Based on those answers, select the best medium for those purposes.

Do you want to educate or inspire your team? Recognize them for their efforts? Inform them of changes in the field or a pivot in overall organizational strategy?

There are many types of messages we deliver in writing. Be clear on your audience's needs and what your goals are before selecting the right media and format.

One IT manager used an all-company email blast with an attached cover letter to at once introduce herself and unveil an ambitious new technology initiative in detail. The next morning she frantically posted a second email begging employees *not* to open her attachment due to a virus embedded within it. It helps to know and weigh the strengths and weaknesses of e-mail vs. twitter vs. memos vs. blog posts before selecting the right medium.

Your Communication Palette

Today's communication palette offers many tools for spreading your written message. Consider these options:

Twitter: Tweets of 140 characters are ideal to distribute short bursts of inspiration, insight, or instruction. Their beauty is brevity. Study bumper-stickers, greeting cards, or epitaphs for good examples.

E-Mail: Know your Netiquette! See our Leadership Tips, July-August 2016 issue: "Write Effective Emails—Get the Response You Want" for tips on effective emails.

Memo: Short for memorandum, this written piece is a short burst of content usually intended to inform, rather than inspire or motivate. Like a tweet, it's designed to be a quicker read.

Written Report: A crisp, well-organized report can powerfully convey summary information for action. Make it brief but impactful by using effective headings and bold, bulleted, or numbered lists to brief others on the status of projects or campaigns.

White Paper: This publication is an informational contribution to your field and showcases your research and depth of knowledge. It's not a sales piece for your organization, though it can enhance your organization's credibility in the industry.

In a world that worships brevity and speed, beware of short instructional communication bursts that might not be self-explanatory or lack appropriate context.

“Even more important
than issuing orders
that can be understood,
is issuing orders
that can't be misunderstood.”

— *General Douglas MacArthur*

At one software company an employee who had recently switched from a VMS to a UNIX e-mail system made a colossal communication error. He mistakenly used a one letter command in response to a private email to his friend. In the new system he instead responded *to the entire company* with his gossip about co-workers and caused embarrassment for all parties tainted by this gaffe.

At the Tone...Write!

Depending on your message, you will need to select the appropriate tone: informational, promotional or persuasive, first person or third person, formal or folksy. Tone, word choice, and style all contribute to the success of your written piece. Even formatting will factor into the impact of your piece.

On Your Mark, Get Set, Prep!

By gaining clarity in advance about your aims and intentions, identifying your audience needs, and determining the appropriate form for delivering your written words, you are paving the way to a successful writing process. You will find that preparation will save you a great deal of time during the actual writing process.

Next edition we'll explore the actual writing process.

THE CONSULTING TEAM'S "Business Writing Basics" training provides you with hands-on instruction in the design and creation of effective business documents including staff reports. It covers writing stages, formats, how to outline, compose, edit, simplify and polish your communiqués for maximum impact. We use real examples from your organization to illustrate what is effective and what can be improved. Participants get lots of hands-on practice.