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Advanced Effective Workplace Writing

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Why Writing is the Most Important Skill to Cultivate

As globalization marches ever-onward, the world gets smaller and smaller and collaboration technology gets better and better. Yet only a handful of these advancements (international conference calls, Skype, video chats, etc.) allow people to speak rather than to write. Now, more information is exchanged via text than ever before, making it extremely important that you can communicate effectively in writing.

Unless you plan on abstaining from participation in this knowledge economy, which grows more and more important with each passing day, you will need to learn how to write at least passably well. You don't have to be Shakespeare, but you do need to know how to express yourself properly in written form. Here are four important rules to follow from my own personal experience in the business world.

1) Always, ALWAYS proofread everything. I cannot stress this enough. You can't always catch every mistake in something you write yourself, but you can (and will) catch the majority of them, if you take the time to read carefully through everything you write. During the hiring process especially, people pay a lot of attention to your writing. I, for one, will not even consider hiring someone with more than one or two mistakes in his resume or cover letter. I am a little more forgiving when it comes to emails, but an especially sloppy one can get you tossed out of contention "just like that."

2) Don't ignore common writing rules. Facebook, text messaging, and email have made us a lot lazier when it comes to writing. Many people ignore the common rules of grammar, punctuation, capitalization, and spelling when they use these means of communication. This is a mistake, as it can often spill over into your work communications as well. You know the saying, "Dress for the job you want, not the job you have," right? Well, the same goes for writing. If your emails look like they came from someone who doesn't belong in upper management, you can be sure that you'll never get there.

3) Don't write the way you talk. Perhaps some people can get away with this. They choose their words carefully, have an excellent vocabulary, and know what good grammar is when they hear it. But most of us need to write better than we talk. How many times have you gotten in an argument with someone because he or she (or you) said something that they didn't

quite mean because they spoke without thinking? This situation should never happen when you write. You have the time to be exact. So be exact.

4) Be sure to get help from a “real writer” when writing something important. Not everyone is a literary genius, but everyone is a critic. We know when we see unprofessional writing where professionalism is called for, and we are quick to make judgments about a business when we do. Don’t let sub-par writing come between you and a sale, an opportunity, or anything else that you want. It might take a little extra time, but it will be worth it in the end.

Remember these four rules and you will be immediately ahead of 80% of the competition out there.

Professional e-mail Etiquette Guidelines

"There are four ways, and only four ways, in which we have contact with the world. We are evaluated and classified by these four contacts: what we do, how we look, what we say, and how we say it." - Dale Carnegie (1888-1955) American Educator

When it comes to your business e-mail communications, you need to make an impression that can lend to the determination that you are a credible professional enterprise and someone that will be easy and a pleasure to do business with. You only have one chance to make that first impression which will be invaluable to building trust and confidence.

Top 10 Business Email Etiquette issues that need to be considered with every commercial e-mail sent.

SUBJECT	The window into your e-mail and can determine if your e-mail will be opened.
Level of Formality	Try to avoid the prevailing assumption that e-mail by its very nature allows you to be informal in your business e-mail.
Addressing	How do you address your new contacts?
TO, From, BCC, CC	These fields can make or break you:
TO	Type the contacts name formally-John B. Doe - not john b doe or JOHN B DOE.
FROM	Make sure you have your full name formally typed
BCC	Use this field when e-mailing a group of contacts who do not personally know each other
CC	Use this field when there are a handful of associates involved in a discussion that requires all be on the same page
Formatting	Refrain from using any formatting in your day-to-day business e-mail communications. Never type in all caps, it is unprofessional and rude.
Attachments	If you need to send a large size file business courtesy dictates you ask the recipient first if it is O.K.
Using Previous E-mail	Always start a new e-mail and add your contacts to your address book.

New Correspondence	Don't give the perception that you are lazy
Down Edit	Do not just hit reply and start typing. Use common courtesy Be careful with signatures

There you have it! The above Top 10 items will certainly allow your business communications to rise above the majority who do not take the time to understand and master these issues. When forging new business relationships and solidifying established partnerships, the level of professionalism and courtesy you relay in your business e-mail communications will always gain clients over the competition that may be anemic, uninformed or just plain lazy in this area.

When it comes to business, regardless of mode of communication used, professionalism and courtesy never go out of style!

Business email etiquette speaks volumes about the sender and their company.

8 Rules of Business Email Etiquette

Most of us send dozens of emails per day, some of them for personal reasons, others for professional purposes. There are a few important rules to live by, especially when sending a business email.

Rule #1: Always be professional

A business email should reflect the same style as a business letter with a greeting and a closing.

Even if the message is part of a long email string, it is good to keep a professional tone, regardless of how casual the other exchanges may be.

Rule #2: Make it brief

No one likes to read a novel of an email. To keep your reader's attention, make your email short and to the point.

Keep your paragraphs between two and four sentences and focus on putting your points in bullets or numbering them. This will make things much easier to read on a screen on smart phone.

Rule #3: Be careful when replying

Most of us feel that we get too much email in the span of a workday. Lessen the pain for others by being selective with the "reply to all" button. Only use it when necessary. Send the email to the person it is intended for, not the whole office.

Rule #4: Re-read before sending

It can be incredibly easy to send an email quickly only to go back later and realize that your grammar was incorrect or that you misspelled a few words. Avoid these mistakes by taking a few minutes to re-read your email before sending it out..

Rule #5: Respond in a timely manner

Try to respond in no more than 24 hours—its common courtesy. If you can't respond fully, just write a short note saying that you are working on the request and will get back to them at a specified time.

Rule #6: Don't forget to attach documents

If you plan to attach a document, do it as soon as you refer to the document in the email. So often people forget to attach even when they indicate an attachment. It pays to attach right away so you don't have to send a second email.

Rule #7: Avoid angry emailing

We've all gotten emails that have made us bristle. It is recommended to write a response and then sit on it for several hours, even overnight before sending. Put it in your draft box, re-read it and make sure it doesn't sound too abrasive before sending.

Rule #8: Know when *not* to send an email

When dealing with sensitive, even confidential information, consider alternatives to email such as in-person meetings and phone calls.

Not everything should be done over email. Remember that email is *not* private, it can be sent to other people. So if you have a lengthy message to send or something you think may be misconstrued in writing, try an alternative mode of communication to get your point across.

Texting for Professionals

With the advancements in smart phone technology, text messaging is becoming a more popular way to communicate. Commonly referred to as “texting”, this method of communication is simple, efficient and effective.

But what’s considered acceptable when texting friends is very different than what is acceptable when texting business contacts.

Here are 20 short tips to help you make good decisions.

1. **Don’t send a text, unless it’s urgent.** When you send people a text, in most cases you will be interrupting them. The default settings on most mobile phones ring or vibrate when it receives a text message. So if you are going to interrupt someone, make sure you have a good reason.
2. **Don’t send a text message if you can send an email.** Every business professional I know checks his or her email at least twice a day and almost all of them prefer communication by e-mail rather than texting. For the most part, their reasons are time management based. People don’t like being interrupted unless it’s urgent and they are more productive if they respond to all their messages during scheduled blocks of time. For most people it’s also more efficient to type messages on a computer rather than on a phone.
3. **Don’t send a text if you should make a call.** If you know that the subject of your message will require back and forth communication, either pick up the phone and call the person or if it’s not time sensitive, send an email requesting a specific time to talk. I also want to point out that business relationships are seldom built or strengthened through text messaging, so use it sparingly.
4. **Avoid texting people who don’t text you.** According to a *Success Magazine* survey, only 4% of the business professionals surveyed prefer texting to other forms of communication. If you have never received a text message from someone, consider that they may not like to text.
5. **Don’t text bad news.** If you have bad news to share with people, give them the courtesy of a call. Emailing or texting bad news is a cop out.
6. **Don’t type in CAPS.** Reading CAPS is harder and is generally referred to as YELLING!

7. **Don't assume people know what all the acronyms and text slang mean.** Not everyone knows that *tyl* means "talk to you later" or *jk* means "just kidding". Say what you mean and make sure your messages present you as a business professional, rather than a texting junkie.
8. **Don't text during meetings.** If you send or read texts during a meeting, your actions convey that the meeting is not important to you. After all, how can you focus on the discussion that's taking place if you are texting? It would be just like having a verbal side conversation. Clearly inconsiderate and disrespectful.
9. **Use punctuation.** Type your texts using the same punctuation you would use in your emails. Since these are business texts, make sure they present you well.
10. **Don't text after business hours unless there's a good reason.** If you have something to share with someone after business hours, consider using email. If you want people to respect your family and personal time, respect theirs. You also run the risk of losing your influence if you don't respect people's private time.
11. **Proof your messages.** Take an extra few seconds and make sure you don't have any misspellings or improper language. Be proud of the messages you send.
12. **Get to the point.** Since a text message is limited to a small number of words, get to the point in your message and keep it from spilling over into another message. If you have a lot to share, consider picking up the phone or sending an email.
13. **Include your name.** Unless you are absolutely certain that the recipient of your text has your name plugged into their phone, add your name to the end of the message.
14. **Watch your tone.** Make sure you pay close attention to the tone of your message. If you are upset about something, pick up the phone and call the person.
15. **Return text messages.** If someone sends you a text, they expect a response in a reasonable period of time. Show that you are a responsible person by returning all messages in a timely manner.

16. **Don't send a text after leaving a message.** As a general rule, if you call someone, you should always leave a message. After leaving a message, don't follow up with a text message unless it is URGENT. Consider that your call interrupted them once. You don't want your text to interrupt them a second time.
17. **Don't leave people hanging.** If you are done with a text conversation, let the person know.
18. **Don't waste people's time.** Don't send unnecessary text messages. As an example, when a text conversation is clearly over, don't send another message. Once again, every text you send is likely to interrupt someone's activity, meeting or train of thought.
19. **Show respect and courtesy.** Whatever you do, consider how it affects those around you. Unless it's urgent, avoid sending texts when you are spending time with people.
20. **Not while you are driving.** While this seems like common sense, I am shocked by the number of people I see sending text messages in cars. Next to drunk drivers, distracted drivers are the second leading cause of fatal automobile accidents.

If you will follow these 20 text-messaging tips, you will be viewed as someone who is professional, considerate and respectful of other people's time. You may want to consider implementing these same tips in your personal

Practicing these texting lessons will certainly bring more peace into your life and allow you to better control your time.

Effective Business Communications

Everyone can use a little help making their business communications more effective. Here are tips you can try today.

1. Write the way you speak

Take a look at your letters and memos. Do they sound like you or someone else? Effective business communications don't need to be formal or stuffy to communicate with most readers. Most readers understand what you're saying more easily when you use a normal, conversational tone.

2. Take a positive approach

When readers are confronted by a negative message, they become blocked on an emotional level and often cannot fully absorb the entire message. So no matter what the message even if it isn't what the reader was hoping to receive deliver the message using a positive tone and a positive approach.

3. What's the Benefit

If you really want to reach your readers, tell them how they will benefit from the message you're communicating. Tell them what they stand to gain.

4. Write at the correct level

So you have a masters in psychology. Big deal! Most of your readers won't. And you will not impress them with big words. You'll only confuse them.

A business communication is written to communicate. To do that effectively, your readers must understand the message you are sending, be sure to use words your readers will understand.

5. Never send communications when you're angry

It's okay to be angry. But communications written when you are still angry tend to be accusatory or condemning in tone. Little things can slip into your writing that you would not normally allow, putting up walls between you and your reader or fostering ill will.

In business, it is never wise to totally burn your bridges. So wait until you calm down before you send off that message and then choose your words carefully.

6. Anticipate questions

As you are writing a communication, try to anticipate what questions, if any, your reader will have. Then answer them right away. Your reader will benefit from being informed up-front and you'll save on additional correspondence or communications to answer those questions later.

7. Remove Acronyms and Jargon

Common acronyms, words, and phrases within your specific industry may seem like everyday language to you. But what about your readers? If you're writing to a colleague in the same field, it may be acceptable to use industry jargon. But if you're writing to someone and you're not certain what their level of understanding is, spell it out in clear terms everyone can understand.

8. Longer is Not Necessarily Better

If you can say what you want to say in three paragraphs, why write five? Extra text doesn't necessarily enhance the message. Sometimes it just buries it and bores the reader. Tighten up your text. Make each word count. Every sentence should convey something meaningful.

9. Patience

If you can wait an extra day before sending the communication, take advantage of that extra time.

10. Final Proof

Write the communication one day, get a good night's sleep, and then proof it a final time in the morning when you are refreshed and ready to start a new day.

Frequently, you will find or small subtle errors you might otherwise have missed when you were caught up in drafting your message.

If you have difficulty writing effective business communications, writing at your readers level, or with spelling, grammar, or punctuation any aspect of the written communication process take a class to enhance your skills and/or enlist a good secretary or a trusted colleague to proof your communications before you send them.

Writing effective business communications is a skill. It is a skill that can to some degree be learned and developed.

Clichés and why you should avoid them in all forms of communications.

When you envision a polished and successful professional you likely see a well-dressed, confident and determined person. The visual perfection and certainty they exude contributes to our perception of an accomplished and high performance professional.

While a smooth appearance and a savvy manner can do much to set a person ahead of their peers, one fatal flaw can quickly deflate their lead and bring them back to earth. The blemish protrudes from something in which we all have – a mouth. Our mouth can bring forth catchphrases which lean more towards clichés.

A cliché is a trite or stereotypical phrase or sentence expressing a common thought with a loss of originality and ingenuity. It's also impacted by the fact that it's overused.

When we use clichés we demonstrate our lack of ability to master our own language and express ourselves and make our audience understand our message.

How we make people feel is one of the most significant things we do when we communicate. We want people to listen to our message and value it. We want to differentiate

ourselves from the competition and be memorable.

If you can't speak to inspire and connect with people, don't speak at all. People will cease to listen to you when you use words everyone else is using.

Start with these simple clichés and then move on to the Encyclopedia of Business Clichés and work at removing clichés from your communications.

At the End Of the Day – At the end of the day – it's simply evening time and nothing else. This overused cliché is basically saying when you consider everything this is the solution or product which will fulfill your needs or solve your problem. Our presentation should strongly convey this message not a kitschy catchphrase.

Circle Back – You're not circling back rather you're doing what all quality professionals do and that's follow-up.

Value Added – If our product or service is valuable it will stand on its own. There is a total package you'll receive and there's a total cost to acquire it. Our customer or prospect isn't naïve. They understand a salesperson has only so much leeway to include additional incentives. The reality is nothing is "thrown in," it's simply an aspect of what you're allowed to offer to entice the prospect to believe in the value you're pitching.

The Customer is Always Right – Many believe this cliché came to life in 1908, coined by Department Store magnate Harry Gordon Selfridge. The reality is no one is always right, though this one can give our prospect or customer an unlimited and dangerous license to increase their demands to an unreasonable level.

Reach Out - Doesn't tell your client anything. If you want to assure your client that you will contact them, tell them in plain and simple words. "I will call you." "I will e-mail you the quote." Reach out sounds phony, trite and noncommittal.

Words have power. Words strung together in clichés have lost some or all of their power. Clichés are a sign of a tired mind that settles for a well-worn rut instead of climbing to exciting new heights.

Your job as a professional is to energize people, not put them to sleep with overused words, to speak so people understand and feel comfortable with what you say.

The Encyclopedia of Business Clichés

<http://www.squidoo.com/businesscliches>

Think as you move through this week about your level of professionalism, the tools that requires and if you instinctively know the roles you need to assume and if you do so seamlessly and with confidence.

Resolving Conflict

Conflict happens. It is inevitable. It is going to happen whenever you have people with different expectations. This makes conflict management critical, whether avoiding arguments, disputes, lasting conflict or ultimately, litigation. Conflict can be avoided if steps are taken early in a discussion to diffuse anger and facilitate communication, and it can be resolved by applying a series of thoughtfully applied steps.

1. Stay Calm.

Thomas Jefferson said, "Nothing gives one so much advantage over another as to remain always cool and unruffled under all circumstances." The thing that leads to conflict is escalation. What starts people escalating is their anger. Most of us stop listening to understand as we get angry. Instead, we start listening in order to argue back. Remaining calm is essential for performing these tools. To remain calm, it helps to look at the big picture. If you think about it, most every dispute gets resolved eventually. So when conflict inevitably happens, it is helpful to stop and think that, chances are, it is going to be resolved eventually. As such, why not begin problem solving now?

2. Listen to Understand.

Now, picture a dispute in which you were recently involved. Maybe it was this morning leaving the house, with a co-worker or client or even with a family member. As you replay that experience, ask yourself how much listening was going on. My bet is that any listening was only being done to formulate an argument back to prove your point. When most of us get into a dispute, the first thing we do is stop listening to formulate your reply. The only way to settle a dispute or solve any kind of a problem is to listen carefully to what the other person is saying and think about what you are hearing.

5. Attack the Problem, Not the Person.

Your points will be heard more clearly if you can depersonalize your comments and point only at the issue. Rather than accusing people of "always messing things up," it is better to say, "We'll have to take a closer look at why this keeps happening." In most statements that we make in a dispute, we are fighting with our own anger and are tempted to put a zinger into the point we are trying to get across. You will be heard better and improve your chances of resolving the issue the way you want if you can catch yourself and take the zinger out. Obviously, this is easier with e-mail and requires great concentration when in a face-to-face disagreement.

6. Avoid the Blame Game.

Assigning blame is only helpful in one instance in problem solving - if you assign it to yourself. Generally speaking, figuring out whose fault something is does not do any good if the goal is to fix a problem. It is a diversion and sometimes a costly one because if a person feels blamed, he/she often checks out of a conversation. The trick to resolving clashes is to focus on problem solving, rather than pointing fingers. Focus on what you and the others can do to solve a problem and make it better, and it will be behind you before you know it.

7. Focus on the Future, Not the Past.

In the past tense, we have the purchase order, the contract, the agreement and the deal as it was understood by all involved. The present and future tenses are where the solution ends. Rather than focusing on what went wrong or who should have done what, the secret to dispute resolution is to treat it like problem solving and focus on what can be done to resolve the problem. Once that is done, companies can look to the past tense to analyze what went wrong and how to improve quality control and efficiency. However, when there is a problem that has an angry customer or a disgruntled employee, the solution is all that anyone is interested in.

8. Ask the Right Kind of Questions.

Questions such as "Why is that?" or "What did you think it would be?" make a person who you are talking to defensive. They inherently question the person's judgment or opinion, as well as coming off as curt. More often than not, people ask these short, direct questions, the type that can sound like a police officer's interrogation or a lawyer's cross-examination. These questions are designed to get just what you want from someone, rather than to permit them to tell you what they want you to know about something. If you want someone to answer you with real information, rather than just arguing back, it is best to give them a little information first. For example, "Since I don't have a copy of the P.O. in front of me, it would help me to investigate this if you could tell me more about how the colors on your order are described." Telling them why you are asking, puts your intent first, so they don't have to guess it. This questioning style tells a person that you are trying to do your job and to figure out some facts to get to reach a solution. By delivering your request in a poised and attentive tone, it makes the person you are asking less defensive and gets you more of what you want.

9. Pick Your Battles.

It is also important when asking questions to remember to Pick Your Battles. Human nature makes us want to be right, even to the point of being defensive or arguing points that do not matter in the big picture. It is even fair game to ask the other person, "On a

scale of one-to-10, how important is this issue to you?" If an issue is a five to you and a nine to the person you are talking to, it is best to give that point up and use the same scale when an item is really important to you. Business relations are, a "60-60 proposition." Most people think it is supposed to be 50-50, but the truth is, when adjusted for each person's perspective on how much they give vs. how much they receive, it really is a 60-60 proposition.

10. Link Offers.

Car salesmen do this all the time. They ask you what you want your monthly payment to be and then set the price of the car and the interest rate on the loan or lease so that they can match your monthly payment. Essentially, it's a way of saying, "I can either do this or that, which would be better for you?" It really is just sales skills - giving people the choice between two positives, so that they feel as if you are trying to help.

11. Be Creative.

Brainstorm. Remember that everything is negotiable. Feel free to think outside of the box in order to expand the pie. Make it so that no idea is too farfetched. Being creative with resolutions takes longer, but can yield a true win-win solution. The best solution to a dispute is to get more business out of it. As such, one common problem-solving technique is to propose that instead of a cash refund, giving clients a deep discount on future orders in order to show what a good job you are capable of doing for them.

Learn to create win-win solutions, where instead of just compromising; you actually collaborate to reach a solution that benefits everyone. This requires listening when asking the open-ended questions and gathering morsels of good information that you will later use to formulate proposals that meet their interests.

12. Be Confident.

You can do this! Many people are afraid of confrontation and shy away from it. All you have to do is follow the steps.

Furthermore, you must do this. Now that you have these tools, it is imperative that you do something about it. You owe it to your customers and your co-workers.

13. Celebrate Agreement!

This kind of negotiation is a hard process. It requires two people to remain in an uncomfortable, potentially confrontational position for a long time to rebuild trust and be creative while trying to figure out the best, rather than the fastest, solution. Once it is

accomplished, both you and the person you are talking to deserve a good pat on the back. There is nothing wrong with going to lunch or dinner to celebrate the resolution of a dispute that could have been destructive, but that ended with a win-win solution where everyone was satisfied. This is an important process for avoiding more serious disputes such as lawsuits and losing hard-earned customers. Congratulate yourself and your partner in this solution. After all, nothing is more important than your company and its survival. Nothing is better for your company's survival than learning to make peace and resolve the inevitable disputes that will arise. Learn to cultivate peace with customers, suppliers, employees, labor and management.

Utilizing these tools takes patience and generally requires changing old behaviors. When people on the front lines, in human resources, customer service and client relations, use simple tools such as these, they would resolve most disputes at the beginning.

Session Name: **Adv Effective Writing**

Instructor: **Ellen Reddick**

The information provided or concepts taught during this training:

- | | |
|---|---|
| <ul style="list-style-type: none"> a. Are new to me. b. Deepened an earlier understanding. c. Are mostly concepts/skills I am already proficient at and use regularly. | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> d. Are a useful reminder of things I already know. e. Are mostly common knowledge. |
|---|---|

	Strongly Disagree	Disagree	Agree	Strongly Agree	Not Applicable
I clearly understood the course objectives.	1	2	3	4	N/A
The scope of information on this topic is appropriate for my role.	1	2	3	4	N/A
The instructor was knowledgeable.	1	2	3	4	N/A
The instructor made the course interesting.	1	2	3	4	N/A
The instructor presented the material in a clear and effective manner.	1	2	3	4	N/A
The instructor encouraged questions or participation.	1	2	3	4	N/A
The duration of the course was suitable.	1	2	3	4	N/A
The way the course was delivered was an effective way for me to learn the subject matter.	1	2	3	4	N/A
This training will improve my job performance in some way.	1	2	3	4	N/A
Based on your response to the prior question, how much improvement would you estimate will be the result?	0-10%	11-25%	26-50%	51-75%	76-100%
What is the business impact of this session? (Check all that apply)	Please provide an example of how you will apply this information to impact any of the items you checked.				
<input type="radio"/> Increasing quality of work					
<input type="radio"/> Increasing productivity					
<input type="radio"/> Decreasing cost					
<input type="radio"/> Decreasing risk					
<input type="radio"/> Increasing employee satisfaction					
<input type="radio"/> Increasing customer satisfaction					
<input type="radio"/> Improving a process					
<input type="radio"/> Self-Development					
<input type="radio"/> Other:					
<input type="radio"/> None					

What about this session was most useful?

What about this session was least useful?

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