



Business Writing 101

by Chanon Collins

Gene Fowler, a writer of Western fiction, once said that “writing is easy – all you do is stare at a blank sheet of paper until drops of blood form on your forehead.” The act of writing is truly not that horrific, but to some writing is a painful and dreaded activity. Think back to your days in high school as you struggled to pen a research paper – it was probably not the most enjoyable task.

As one who finds the act of writing to be entertaining, I can sympathize with those who run from a piece of paper and a pen. With this thought in mind, a few helpful hints for business writing are in order. The first step to successful writing is to confront the task directly. Almost everyone engages in the act of writing in their daily activities – from logging invoices and drafting memos to creating mission statements and position contracts. In each of these activities communication is key.

Once you direct your focus and recognize the impact of your piece of prose, you must consider your audience. You are not writing a memo to practice your penmanship, you are writing to communicate important information to others. The first item to consider is - “who is your audience”? The answer to this question will give your writing a focal point. Is the intended reader an employee with little knowledge of the topic? Or is the reader a global one to whom you are introducing a new product?

After your reader has been identified, your vocabulary must be adjusted so that the reader can understand your communication. It is in bad form, and a grave error in communication, to use jargon or language that is incomprehensible to your audience. Just as doctors have a different vocabulary base for their patients and their associates, business managers and team members must use various jargon to communicate. Business writing is not the best vehicle to illustrate your vast vocabulary. Don’t use language that you will have to explain - unless you enjoy teaching vocabulary.

You have established your audience and your vocabulary. Now you must address your content. Consider what your audience knows about the topic before you begin explaining the issues. You should not belittle the intelligence of

ALLEN PRITCHETT & BASSETT, LLP
POST OFFICE BOX 349, TIFTON, GEORGIA 31793
229.382.6960 FAX: 229.382.6992
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your reader by painfully explaining the process of an everyday activity, nor should you ignore an item that deserves detail.

The reader is known, the content is selected, and the vocabulary is chosen; now you must identify your tone. This element of writing is a crucial item. It is the tone of a piece of writing that will sway your readers to commit to your cause or it will give fuel to their flames of opposition. Tone speaks to the readers' emotions and desires. You should give great consideration to the tone of a piece before it reaches the final draft.

The basic points to remember when writing are few – audience, topic, and tone. There are, of course, numerous other elements to consider, but for direct written communication, these items are key. You should also proof every document before it is published. It is helpful to have others proof your writing; they will see things that you have subconsciously ignored. Remember, writing is a serious business. If you can't do it, find someone who can.

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