

## Say It Write: 10 Tips For Effective Business Writing

By Anita R. Paul



Picture this—you've been glaring at your computer screen for twenty minutes thinking of the right opening for that letter you need to send off to your client. It can't be that difficult to write a simple letter, right. But if you want to get your point across and get the results you want, you had better be clear, concise and cordial, which is a lot easier said than done for the novice wordsmith.

For most entrepreneurs and business executives, communicating in written form is an unavoidable daily task. From emails and letters to proposals, brochures, and hand-written notes, the variety and volume of written communications generated by a business on any given day is enough to make you want to give up writing altogether and just phone everyone. But who has time for that?

Rather than waste valuable time writing and re-writing, apply these 10 tips to make your written communications sound as if they were written by a pro.

### Get to the point

Research has shown that if your message doesn't appeal to the reader within 30 seconds or one paragraph it gets lost or tossed. Of course, you have a lot to say, but your audience may not want to read it all. So before writing your letter, brochure or web site copy, make a list of the three most important points you want to get across, then toss two and focus on the main point. Not only should you get to the point early in your written communications, but stick to the main point throughout.

### The five Ws

The five Ws are the keys to ensuring you've effectively addressed the basic questions any reader would have—who, what, when, where, why.

- Who—is the contact; makes the decisions; will benefit?
- What—time will we meet; do you charge; is your experience?
- When—is the deadline; did you start your business; will you follow up?
- Where—is your office located; will we meet; should we send the check?
- Why—are you qualified; should we trust you; do you think this will work?

### Ask for what you want...and tell them what to do

Asking your reader to act on your proposal, question or promotion, and instructing them how to respond, is critical to getting the results you expect. A simple line such as, "I would like your assistance with this matter, please contact me at (phone number)," is a great way to do this. Or, "We believe we offer the best service for the price, and we want to work with you. Call us to schedule a meeting." Think about it this way, you get what you ask for. Ask for nothing and that's exactly what you will get.

### State the benefit

People want to know what's in it for them. So when you write business communications, let your readers know how they will benefit. Don't spend too much time focused on the features of your product. Instead, the reader wants to know how your product will benefit them. Try using "you" more often than "we" or "our" in your writing. Your audience will feel much more included and will be more apt to respond favorably.

**Use words that excite and entice**

Don't make any pie-in-the-sky promises, and definitely don't stretch the truth, but do make your communications sound interesting and promote action. Words such as "learn", "find", "advance", "save" and "free" tend to motivate people to do something.

**Keep it simple and short (KISS)**

You've probably heard of the acronym KISS—Keep It Simple, Stupid. Well, here's a kinder version—Keep It Simple and Short. Sure you want to impress your clients or colleagues with your extensive vocabulary, but if the concepts in your communication are confusing, you're dead in the water before you've even begun to swim. Use language that is easy for your reader to understand. Don't over explain concepts or over sell your services. Remember tip #1.

**Be creative, not cute**

For your company's print ad, brochure or web site, opt for professional creativity that is non-offensive, clever and stimulating. Avoid the risk of offending a potential customer, eliminate any humorous references.

**Use a style guide**

Proper grammar, spelling and punctuation are important in your business communications. So find a reliable style guide and use it often. Visit Amazon.com or Google and search "writer's style guide" for a wealth of useful resources.

**Proofread and edit**

Proofread for content, clarity, consistency and style. Edit for grammar, spelling and punctuation. Your style guide will come in handy here. Be sure to have someone not directly associated with your communication review it—a co-worker, business partner, intern or assistant. A fresh eye is extremely important in finding errors.

**Keep your audience in mind**

Although listed last, this is probably by far the most important tip. After all, you're writing to communicate to someone else. Keeping your reader's interests and needs in mind is key to writing with purpose and getting the results you want. Sure, you know what you want to say, but do you know what your audience wants to hear? Stay truthful, and say it the way they want to hear it.

These ten tips are not in any particular order because they are all equally important to helping you write effectively for business. It is not more important to get to the point than it is to state the benefit. Nor is it more important to be creative than it is to proofread.

As an executive or entrepreneur, you have a lot to gain (and to lose) when it comes to communicating in written form. So keep these tips in mind each time you write to help ensure you get your point across and realize maximum results for your written communications.

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