Written Communication

Even though business men and women are using electronic communication more frequently than in the past, important information is written in business letter form, even if that letter is going to be attached to an e-mail or faxed to the receiver. Business letters are considered professional and much more formal.

There are certain advantages in using written communication:

- Provides you time to think about what you are going to write, organize your thoughts, write the letter, revise the letter, and edit the letter
- Provides your company with a record
- Provides a more relaxed route of communication
  1. Phone conversations can be awkward
  2. Misunderstandings can and do happen over the phone
  3. Phone conversations are not always convenient for all parties

There are three basic characteristics of written communication:

- Readability: Readability refers to the ease with which your audience will understand your letter.
  1. The more words and syllables of words per sentence, the more difficult the letter will be to read
  2. Use typographical and highlighting features to organize dense texts
- Organization and Form: Organization and form refers to the structure and placement of the content of your written communication
  1. Letters, e-mails, and memos each have their own form
- Business Style: Business style refers to the way that you write your sentences
  1. Use first person: I/we. (avoiding first person comes across impersonal)
  2. Avoid nominalizations—a nominalization is changing a verb to a noun. Example: We have viewed the documentation. Documentation is the nominalized verb. Who documented the documentation that was viewed? Insurance folks use these types of discourse patterns to avoid technical or lengthy writing; however, it comes across as if you are hedging or hiding something
  3. Passive Constructions: When you use passive sentences, you take away the agency or the actor. An error was made? Someone had to make an error. Instead write: We made an error.
  4. Negative Constructions: Negative constructions come across as being too blunt. A negative comment: Your comment about our company having a narrow demographic is wrong. Instead write: Thank-you for your observation about our company; however, our marketing team specifically targets a variety of consumers in all types of demographic categories.
  5. Use the “you viewpoint” as much as possible. Using the “you viewpoint” removes the focus from you and your company and places it back onto the reader. The focus on you and your company: In order for me to give you a refund, I must have a copy of the receipt. A more effective sentence: In order for you to receive your refund, please bring or fax a copy of your receipt. The last example places all of the attention on the consumer.
  6. Avoid clichés, slang, colloquialisms, jargon, net speak, and lofty words.
     a) Cliché: A cliché is a type of figurative speech that has become commonplace through over use. Busy as a bee. Better late than never. When you write with
clichés, you run the risk of your audience members not understanding your meaning.


c) Colloquial: Colloquial usage involves informal words or phrases that are regional to either a culture, a small region, or even national. In a bind is a regional phrase that may not be understood outside of the United States.

d) Jargon: Jargon is involves the use of a specialized vocabulary associated with a trade or profession and is understood within that group. Lurking or de-lurking. Friend me and defriend me.

e) Net Speak: Net speak refers to the very informal use of language and writing in e-mail, IM, and on social networks. Beginning sentences with lower case is one example. Writing h8 for hate. Net speak can cross from net speak to spoken slang very quickly.

f) Lofty words or pompous: While lofty refers to style of formality that might seem a little stuffy, lofty more often refers to using large words instead of a less puffed up word. Utilize for use is an example. Another example is ascertain instead of find out.

7. Edit your work for incorrect usage.