

Clarity—It's Rule #1 in Writing!

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Clarity should be a writer's highest priority. While everyone nods in agreement, miscommunication is rampant. How many of us have had the unsettling experience of trying to assemble a child's toy, only to be thwarted by unclear directions. Anyone interested in healthy living will tell you how difficult it is to make wise food choices when they can't understand the contents on a label.

While aggravating on the home-front, imagine what havoc confusing emails or other written documents cause the already overworked business professional. It is estimated that millions of dollars are lost each year in fines, missed deadlines and productivity due to miscommunication. So how do you rid yourself of ambiguity?

Say it simply

Business professionals get into trouble when they try to "dress it up." The best approach is to streamline your ideas so that an eighth grader could understand them. Keep your sentence structures simple. Forget attaching all sorts of phrases and clauses to your main ideas. These "dangling" phrases or clauses leave people second guessing your meaning.

Be specific

Avoid generalities. Consider this statement, "Customer Satisfaction is down 9%" While we know it is down, we are not sure what market segments are involved or what issues were surveyed. Anecdotes and examples are necessary to make abstract ideas resonate with readers.

Be careful of long bullet point lists and sub-bullet points

People want to get ideas quickly. The fewer the words in any bullet point, the better it is for the reader. Bullet points written in full sentences, inevitably, provide unnecessary details. Sub-bullet points further confuse the issue. Rather than sub-bullet points, include additional information in an appendix. Always ask yourself, "Does this depth of information help or hinder my reader?"

Eliminate jargon

Every company has its own jargon or slang, but also every business unit within that same corporation. For example, the people in IT often talk or write using acronyms that only engineers or developers would understand. The same is true for people in benefits, sales or accounting. We get so used to our own vernacular that we forget others aren't savvy. People who are unsure may incorrectly assume or delay action. You may never know that the reason your recommendation wasn't accepted was because it was misunderstood.

Be concise

Keep it short and to the point. Most business professionals tell us that they carefully read the overview or the introduction and then skim the rest. They just do not have the time to read a lengthy text. Documents longer than two pages are usually not carefully read.

Be vigilant about grammar and punctuation

You don't have to be an expert to catch errors in grammar or punctuation. Try reading your document out loud line by line. You will hear many hard to catch mistakes. If you have an issue with a particular issue of grammar or punctuation, take time to review the basics using a good business writing book.

What you write reflects on your intelligence, thoroughness and professionalism. It is the image you are sending of yourself to your clients and colleagues. Being known as a clear communicator is a feather in your cap.

Impact Communications, Inc. consults with individuals and businesses to improve their face-to-face and over the phone communication skills. It is not what you know but how you communicate it that makes a difference. When you have to have impact, phone (847) 438-4480 or visit our web site, www.ImpactCommunicationsInc.com.