

## How To Improve Your Lousy Writing Skills In The Workplace

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### Become a Great Writer

If there's one important reason why you need to write effectively in the workplace, it is this: the quality of your writing imprints a lasting impression on the reader. This reader may be your boss, a client, or a person who is ready to make a billion dollar business deal with you.

Have you ever read a poorly-written document that made you lose interest right away? It was so poorly-written that you lost trust in the author and asked yourself why the author was wasting your time? How about those junk e-mails that sneak into your junk box like annoying cockroaches? You know the ones I'm referring to: the ones pitching vitamins, software, and sex aids. These e-mails are the biggest showcase of writing blunders, stricken to death with grammar mistakes, misspellings, and sloppy sentences. I doubt these e-mails pull a sale because their poor writing style immediately alienates the reader.

What impression does your writing leave on your boss, clients, or co-workers? Does your writing alienate readers, cause you to lose sales or clients, or cost you job promotions? Or does your writing build streams of loyal readers, increase sales for the company, and help you earn six figures a year at your job?

Whatever type of writing you do in the workplace, always know this reality: readers believe the quality of your writing reflects your skills, work ethics, and integrity as a person. If you write eloquently, clearly, and lively, the reader trusts you and you are able to build rapport quickly. If your writing is sloppy, disorganized, and riddled with errors, the reader assumes the rest of your work is flawed, your work ethics are flawed, and perhaps as a person you are flawed. Why should this reader waste his time reading the rest of your junk or even do business with you?

This article provides fail-safe strategies to help refine your writing and help you to communicate with clarity, simplicity, and impact so you will never write junk again. You will learn five masterful steps to guide you in planning, writing, and refining an article; and you will learn how to avoid common writing mistakes.

### AIM! FIRE! FIRE!

To become a superb writer, your first task is to establish your aim.

Yiddish novelist, dramatist and essayist, Sholem Asch, once said, "Writing comes more easily if you have something to say."

What message do you want to convey with your writing?

To establish your aim, ask yourself:

- 1) "Why am I writing this document?"
- 2) "What do I want to communicate?"
- 3) "Do I want to inform, educate, report, persuade, challenge, or entertain?"

Developing your aim will help you to adopt the best writing style for your reader. For example, an educational document will likely be more formal than one written for entertaining.

### CONNECT WITH YOUR READERS

To write effectively, you need to connect strongly with your readers. Ask yourself:

- 1) "For whom am I writing this? Will I be writing for colleagues, my supervisor, my team of employees, or our clients?"
- 2) "How much information do my readers need?"
- 3) "How familiar are my readers with the topic?"
- 4) "How much time do my readers have? Would my readers prefer a short, succinct presentation of facts and statistics, or more narration and exposition?"

Knowing your audience will allow you to write content in a way that appeals to your readers.

## **SHAPE YOUR DOCUMENT**

You know your aim. You know the people who will likely read your document. Now plan your document. What information will it contain? What information will most likely grab the reader and hold their interests? What points do you need to get across? Start with a rough outline of ideas. Then go through the outline and add more information and more detail. An outline will create the structure for your document. Soon enough your writing will come more easily, quickly, and with greater clarity.

## **WRITE WHAT YOU KNOW BEST**

At this stage, read over your outline and write the first draft. Establish the main idea of the document and support your argument throughout. If a blank white page glares back at you like headlights, just start writing on whatever topic you know best. According to American novelist Jack London, "You can't wait for inspiration. You have to go after it with a club." Don't worry about the sequence if the ideas come to you out of order. You can cut and paste later.

## **WORDY WEIGHT LOSS**

If you have time, step away from the document. Come back to it later with a fresh mind. Now add material where needed. Trim away unnecessary sections. Refine the text to communicate what you want to say. Remember: less is more. Try not to repeat ideas. Repetition, unless necessary, is tiresome for the reader. Keep the piece moving along. Use a lively pace. Progress through your points efficiently.

The following sections address some of the most common writing problems. Use these tips to write more clearly, effectively, and lively.

### **I.) PUNCTUATION**

#### **a) Apostrophes**

Do not use an apostrophe in the possessive form of "it."

Incorrect: Our department submitted it's reports for 2005 last week.

Correct: Our department submitted its reports for 2005 last week.

Do not use apostrophes in the possessive forms "his," "hers," and "ours."

Incorrect: The window office is her's.

Correct: The window office is hers.

Do not use apostrophes in plural nouns.

Incorrect: How many new computer's are we getting?

Correct: How many new computers are we getting?

b) Commas

Do not connect two complete sentences with a comma.

Incorrect: The meeting was cancelled, I finished my work early.

Correct: The meeting was cancelled, so I finished my work early.

Correct: Since the meeting was cancelled, I finished my work early.

## II.) MECHANICS

a) Split Infinitives

Do not insert words between “to” and the infinitive form of a verb.

Incorrect: I was told we needed to slightly tighten the deadline.

Correct: I was told we needed to tighten the deadline slightly.

## III.) SPELLING

a) “A lot” is always two words.

Incorrect: I have alot of work to do.

Correct: I have a lot of work to do.

b) “To” is a function word often used before the infinitive form of a verb (to go).

c) “Too” is an adverb that means “excessively” (too difficult).

d) “Two” denotes the number 2.

Incorrect: This file cabinet is to heavy for me to move.

Correct: This file cabinet is too heavy for me to move.

e) “There” is an adverb indicating a place (over there).

f) “Their” is a possessive word that shows ownership (their computers).

g) “They’re” is the contraction form of “they are.”

Incorrect: There results for this quarter were excellent.

Correct: Their results for this quarter were excellent.

Incorrect: Their working very hard today.

Correct: They’re working very hard today.

## IV.) STYLE

a) Sentence Variety

To write more lively, vary sentence structure. Use alternate ways of beginning, and combine short sentences to create

different sentence lengths.

Before:

I organized the files for all the new accounts this week. Then I created a more efficient labeling system. I color-coded everything. I made sure all paper files had been documented electronically. I put these files in the empty file cabinet.

After:

This week I organized the files for the new accounts and created a more efficient color-coded labeling system. After I documented all paper files electronically, I put these files in the empty file cabinet.

## **V.) ACTIVE VOICE vs. PASSIVE VOICE**

The English language has two "voices": active voice (the subject performs an action); and passive voice (the subject is acted upon). In business communication, all good writers write in active voice. Lazy writers write in passive voice. Writing in active voice shortens your sentences and makes your writing sound more direct and formal.

Examples:

PASSIVE: The recipe book is read by her.

ACTIVE: She reads the recipe book.

PASSIVE: The radio announcement should be listened to by everyone.

ACTIVE: Everyone should listen to the radio announcement.

PASSIVE: The photo is being taken by the photographer.

ACTIVE: The photographer is taking the photo.

## **HELPFUL RESOURCES**

To learn more about fixing common writing mistakes, check out The Electronic Writing Course ( <http://www.ElectronicWritingCourse.com> ). It's a program that teaches the basics of good writing and editing. If you want to check your document against 36,000 style and usage mistakes, check out StyleWriter ( <http://www.StyleWriter-USA.com> ). It's a style and usage Plain English checker. If you want to write more lively and creatively, check out WhiteSmoke Software ( <http://www.WhiteSmokeSoftware.com> ). It's a program that fixes and enriches your text.

If you follow these guidelines, you'll stop yourself from writing lousy in the workplace. Your writing will be lively, clear, and concise, and you will build rapport with readers. Perhaps it's now time to e-mail your boss a perfectly-written e-mail requesting a salary raise?

## **ABOUT THE AUTHOR**

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