

Brought to You by

The logo for Team LiB features the text "Team LiB" in a bold, yellow, sans-serif font with a black outline. A blue swoosh underline arches over the text, starting from the left and ending on the right, framing the letters.

Team LiB

Like the book? Buy it!

POWER

SALES

INCLUDES
DEAL-CLOSING
KEY WORDS &
PHRASES

Writing

LEARN HOW TO:

TURN PROSPECTS INTO CLIENTS
COMMUNICATE BAD NEWS PAINLESSLY
CLOSE DEALS MORE EFFECTIVELY

Sue A. Hershkowitz-Coore

PRAISE FOR
POWER SALES WRITING

“A valuable tool to enhance our writing and sales effectiveness skills. This book should be in every school and business.”

—Howard Putnam, author of *The Winds of Turbulence*
and former CEO of Southwest Airlines

“Sue Hershkowitz-Coore’s latest book, *Power Sales Writing*, is a basic, down-to-earth, easy read that will help anyone improve their writing and communication skills. Sue’s delightful personality is evident in this valuable reference tool.”

—John H. Schnatter, CEO, Papa John’s Pizza

“I’ve been training sales professionals for more than twenty years, and this is the best book I’ve ever read on effective sales writing.”

—Brian Tracy, bestselling author, *Goals!*

“Business success is becoming more dependent on the ability to differentiate and sell your company (and yourself) through your writing skills. The hands-on messages in *Power Sales Writing* are critical to winning in today’s fast-paced global economy.”

—Roger Dow, Senior Vice President, Global and Field Sales,
Marriott International, Inc.

“This book will teach you to write better and faster.”

—Fred Shea, Vice President-Sales Operations,
Hyatt Hotels Corporation

This page intentionally left blank.

POWER SALES WRITING

This page intentionally left blank.



POWER SALES WRITING

Sue Hershkowitz-Coore

McGraw-Hill

New York Chicago San Francisco Lisbon London
Madrid Mexico City Milan New Delhi San Juan
Seoul Singapore Sydney Toronto

Copyright © 2004 by Sue Hershkowitz-Coore. All rights reserved. Manufactured in the United States of America. Except as permitted under the United States Copyright Act of 1976, no part of this publication may be reproduced or distributed in any form or by any means, or stored in a database or retrieval system, without the prior written permission of the publisher.

0-07-143588-3

The material in this eBook also appears in the print version of this title: 0-07-141033-3.

All trademarks are trademarks of their respective owners. Rather than put a trademark symbol after every occurrence of a trademarked name, we use names in an editorial fashion only, and to the benefit of the trademark owner, with no intention of infringement of the trademark. Where such designations appear in this book, they have been printed with initial caps.

McGraw-Hill eBooks are available at special quantity discounts to use as premiums and sales promotions, or for use in corporate training programs. For more information, please contact George Hoare, Special Sales, at george_hoare@mcgraw-hill.com or (212) 904-4069.

TERMS OF USE

This is a copyrighted work and The McGraw-Hill Companies, Inc. (“McGraw-Hill”) and its licensors reserve all rights in and to the work. Use of this work is subject to these terms. Except as permitted under the Copyright Act of 1976 and the right to store and retrieve one copy of the work, you may not decompile, disassemble, reverse engineer, reproduce, modify, create derivative works based upon, transmit, distribute, disseminate, sell, publish or sublicense the work or any part of it without McGraw-Hill’s prior consent. You may use the work for your own noncommercial and personal use; any other use of the work is strictly prohibited. Your right to use the work may be terminated if you fail to comply with these terms.

THE WORK IS PROVIDED “AS IS”. MCGRAW-HILL AND ITS LICENSORS MAKE NO GUARANTEES OR WARRANTIES AS TO THE ACCURACY, ADEQUACY OR COMPLETENESS OF OR RESULTS TO BE OBTAINED FROM USING THE WORK, INCLUDING ANY INFORMATION THAT CAN BE ACCESSED THROUGH THE WORK VIA HYPERLINK OR OTHERWISE, AND EXPRESSLY DISCLAIM ANY WARRANTY, EXPRESS OR IMPLIED, INCLUDING BUT NOT LIMITED TO IMPLIED WARRANTIES OF MERCHANTABILITY OR FITNESS FOR A PARTICULAR PURPOSE. McGraw-Hill and its licensors do not warrant or guarantee that the functions contained in the work will meet your requirements or that its operation will be uninterrupted or error free. Neither McGraw-Hill nor its licensors shall be liable to you or anyone else for any inaccuracy, error or omission, regardless of cause, in the work or for any damages resulting therefrom. McGraw-Hill has no responsibility for the content of any information accessed through the work. Under no circumstances shall McGraw-Hill and/or its licensors be liable for any indirect, incidental, special, punitive, consequential or similar damages that result from the use of or inability to use the work, even if any of them has been advised of the possibility of such damages. This limitation of liability shall apply to any claim or cause whatsoever whether such claim or cause arises in contract, tort or otherwise.

DOI: 10.1036/0071435883

*In loving memory of my daddy,
Philip Hershkowitz,
who would have liked this idea.*

This page intentionally left blank.

[For more information about this title, click here.](#)

Contents

Acknowledgments	xi
Introduction	xiii
PART ONE	
GETTING STARTED	I
Chapter 1: Getting Started	3
Chapter 2: Putting the Prewriting Questions to Work	9
Chapter 3: Writing Made Easy!	19
Chapter 4: Revision: Your Final Step	27
PART TWO	
THE PSYCHOLOGY OF WRITING	37
Chapter 5: Writing Routine Messages	39
Chapter 6: Plan B: Writing to Hostile Readers	47
Chapter 7: The Buffer Zone	53
Chapter 8: Delivering the Bad News Positively, Persuasively, and Professionally	61

Chapter 9: End Friendly and Cooperatively	67
Chapter 10: Never Say You're Sorry	73
PART THREE	
SELLING YOUR IDEAS	81
Chapter 11: Focus on What Matters to Them	83
Chapter 12: Grab Their Attention to Sell Your Idea	93
Chapter 13: Build Interest to Keep Them with You	101
Chapter 14: Deliver Your Features	107
Chapter 15: Educate Enough, but Not Too Much	113
Chapter 16: Ask for What You Want	123
PART FOUR	
PUTTING IT ALL TOGETHER	133
Chapter 17: The Conversational Test	135
Chapter 18: Choose the Correct Word	147
Chapter 19: Email Etiquette	159
Chapter 20: Enhance Your Worth	167
Index	171



Acknowledgments

This book would not have been written had it not been for the thousands and thousands of Power Writing workshop attendees who wanted to learn more, know more, practice more. They prodded me to create a book that they could take home to review so that they could remember the powerful new ideas they had heard, and that would provide more detail and depth than could be presented during a corporate training session. I am grateful to them for asking.

I am thankful for my friends in the National Speakers Association who encouraged me to write my book. Without my best NSA buddy, Joe Charbonneau, I wouldn't have had a career, let alone a book. Larry Winget must also be mentioned for his unique way of motivating me to write.

Barry Neville at McGraw Hill approached me with the idea of updating the book. I am grateful to him, and for his offer to help me with "writer's block." It was procrastination, Barry! Thank you for understanding my schedule, and for having a sense of humor through the whole thing. To Janice Race, and all the unseen editors I know only through your initialed comments, thank you for not allowing me to embarrass myself with my own words! Thank you for your graciousness, patience, and professionalism.

Thank you, also, to my mother, Lois Hershkowitz, for understanding my crazy, ever-busy work life. The same goes for my friends. I appreciate that we are still friends, even if I didn't surface often!

To my son, Michael, thank you for being my best teacher. You have always helped me to see what is really important in life.

And to my husband, Bill, thank you for everything. Always and beyond.



Introduction

As soon as you move one step up from the bottom, your effectiveness depends on your ability to reach others through the written or spoken word.

Peter Drucker

Power Sales Writing will help you communicate your ideas professionally and powerfully. You'll receive the respect and recognition you deserve and get the results you desire.

Whether you are a well-seasoned veteran or working toward the Rookie of the Year award, this book is for you. Chock full of writing strategies to help you build stronger relationships, enhance your credibility in the eyes of your customers and colleagues, and feel confident about your professionalism, this book is specific, realistic, and even fun to read.

Power Sales Writing was written for the hard working, intelligent, capable people, in all professions, who were misled in English class! Too many of us were taught wrong stuff by well-meaning English teachers. Those teachers were good folks,

but they never saw the inside of an office (or had to deal with office politics) and never had to write an email to persuade a prospect to see them (and make quota) or to create a sales proposal to close a deal (and get a commission). Too many of us learned if we could write to please a specific teacher or professor, we'd be okay, when in reality we had to learn much more than they could teach. We had to learn not only technique and the psychology of writing, but also how to compel another busy professional to pay attention and respond to our words.

Many people existed for years without the benefit (and bane!) of email. Some of us were lucky enough to have others do our writing for us. Today, regardless of title or position, we each must respond to and create our own powerful, professional e-messages. This book provides specific techniques and tools to show you how you can write those e-messages thoughtfully and thoroughly to lessen the worry of liability and to get your point across quickly and clearly.

Power Sales Writing is practical, down-to-earth, and fun. It's loaded with fresh new ways to sell your ideas, your products, and your services. You can (and should!) apply the easy-to-use-ideas immediately to dramatically increase the amount of money you put in your pocket and drive revenue for your company.

If you have always wanted to feel confident and comfortable with your writing skills, this book shows you exactly what to do. *Power Sales Writing* is packed with ideas to help you:

- Save up to 80 percent of the time you now spend writing
- Entice your reader to read—and keep reading!
- Format your message for maximum impact
- Ask for—and get—action

- Avoid embarrassing yourself with outdated, silly expressions
- Use your selling time more effectively and profitably
- Persuade others to see your point of view
- Write respectfully to build profitable relationships
- And much, much more!

Use just one idea from this book and you'll write better.
Apply them all and the sky is the limit!

This page intentionally left blank.



PART ONE

GETTING STARTED

Results. Respect. Recognition. That's what this book is about—writing in a manner that will get you what you want and give your reader what he or she needs.

Use the techniques in this first section and you'll create great documents quickly. You'll forget that high school English teacher whom you could please only if you wrote exactly her way (and you know she spent her entire life in academia, never having the pressure you have to make a sales quota, differentiate a product, or convince your manager to buy into your idea). Learn these fundamental and powerful strategies and you'll enjoy greater confidence and save up to 80 percent of the time you now spend writing.

You can write more quickly, more powerfully, and more confidently. Start now!

This page intentionally left blank.

Getting Started

Without a plan, it doesn't matter which way you're going.

Lewis Carroll, *Alice in Wonderland*

If you could save up to 80 percent of the time you spend writing, would you be interested? If you could write not only more quickly, but also more clearly and in a more focused, more powerful style, would you want to know more? If you were practically guaranteed that you'd get better results, drive revenue more easily, and be much more likely to get the respect and recognition you deserve, would you commit to applying a new, simple writing strategy?

This three-step writing process will literally change your life. One CEO I worked with claimed that it had taken him as long as “2½ hours to get started” until he learned this writing strategy. If you can relate to his dilemma of staring at the computer screen, starting, deleting, starting again, going for coffee, deleting, checking out the weather (either by looking at the window or by surfing the Web), starting again, deleting again, getting a second cup of cof-

fee . . . you can now breathe easy. You'll never have to worry about this happening to you again. You'll use a three-step process to start quickly, write powerfully, and edit effectively.

Prewriting Is the Catalyst for Quick, Clear Writing

Prewriting is the first part of the three-step writing process. By prewriting, you quickly develop a direction and a goal, and writing becomes as easy as talking. Prewriting is just what it sounds like: taking the time to focus before you actually write. It only requires that you take the time to answer four simple questions:

- Why am I writing?
- What do I want to say?
- What do I want to accomplish? (What is my motivation for writing?)
- What is the next step? Will my reader know what the next step is, and who is to take that action?

Are these simple questions? Absolutely. In fact, they may appear to be too simple. Don't be fooled. I was selected to present a 2-day Power Writing workshop for a U.S. government bureau. When this client accepted my bid to conduct the training session, he sent me an agreement stating that his approval was required on all materials submitted, and that he had the right to change, modify, or delete anything and everything.

As I always do before presenting corporate training, I asked the participants from this government agency to submit writing sam-

ples. Typically each participant submits three samples, and I design the course content around the strengths and weaknesses in those documents. This client thought three examples weren't enough to give me the true flavor of the participants' writing. He had his 40 attendees submit about 500 pieces of correspondence. I reviewed them (all), created the workbook for the class, and submitted the workbook to him for approval. He phoned me, quite upset. "These four questions at the beginning will never work around here," he said. "All of my people have at least 4-year degrees, and these questions are way too basic for them."

I agreed that the questions are fundamental and reminded him that I'd be with the group for 2 days. During that time we could, if necessary, modify the prewriting questions.

He still wasn't happy and told me that he would approve the workbook only if I insisted. He was sure those questions "will never fly around here."

Today, 9 years later, those questions are still flying! Many of the attendees from the Denver, New York City, and Martinsburg, West Virginia, offices still have the four prewriting questions programmed into their software to remind them to focus before they write anything. They save time, and stay on track, by using the four questions.

Prewriting Clarifies Your Writing Purpose and Puts You on the Path to Success

If you lived in Bend, Oregon, and you wanted to drive to Boca Raton, Florida, you wouldn't just get in your car and start driving. You'd plan your trip, taking into consideration what you wanted to accomplish with the trip. If your goal were efficiency—to reach your

destination quickly—you'd plan the trip one way. If your goal were to enjoy the sights along the way, you'd plan it another way. If your goal were to find the most traveled, the least traveled, or the most historic route, you'd plan it differently. The route you selected would depend on your trip's objectives. Without a plan, you might end up in Bangor, Maine, instead of Boca Raton. You may not mind the detour, but what about your passengers or the people waiting for your arrival in Boca?

Here is the point: If you don't know where you're headed, how will you get there?

We plan almost everything we do. We know how many prospects we need to contact in order to make our quota. We know what clothes we need to pack for the business trip so that we fit in and feel comfortable. We make a list of the groceries we need to buy so that we don't have to make a second trip. Yet we create emails and respond to proposals because . . . uhmm . . . because we have to! And we think our readers will be quite jolly about traveling with us on our detours, and will stick with us until we reach our point. You've got to be kidding!

Powerful writers know why they're writing. They know what they want to achieve, and they write their message using every psychological tool in the shed to keep their reader with them. (We'll get to these various psychological tools in later chapters.) Prewriting enables you to know what you want to achieve so that you can get the reader there—and you can get the result you want.

Answering the four prewriting questions forces you to figure out why you're writing and what you want to accomplish. The 2 minutes you spend answering the questions saves many times that. You eliminate the writing and deleting thing, you eliminate staring at the blank screen, and you eliminate having to clarify your mes-

sage (and having to send another email) when your reader doesn't respond in the manner you had hoped.

Prewriting helps you write more powerfully because you begin with a clear understanding of the purpose of your document. When you know where you're going and how you want to get there, you have a much better chance of reaching your destination without an extra stop in Billings or Boise or Baton Rouge.

Like a good grip in golf or tennis, good form on a bike, or focused balance in martial arts, prewriting is the fundamental step for achieving your business goals.

This page intentionally left blank.

Putting the Prewriting Questions to Work

You will find only what you bring in.

Yoda, Jedi Master, *Star Wars*

Click on the last email you initiated. Ask yourself the prewriting questions:

- Why were you writing?
- What did you want to say?
- What did you want to accomplish? (What was your motivation for writing?)
- What is the next step? Will your reader know what the next step is, and who is to take that action?

In reviewing what you wrote (and what your reader read), can you now (and could she then) easily answer these questions? Were your intent (why you were writing) and your message (what you

wanted to say) clear? Did you accomplish your goal? Was the next step in the process direct and specific?

Here is a situation to help you apply this prewriting technique:

This morning, at 6:00 a.m., your client calls you on your mobile phone. She is very sorry to bother you at such an early hour, but she has just found out that she has to take care of a major problem in Paris, and she is leaving immediately. She is calling you to see if you can do X for her. You have no idea if you can do it. It's 6:00 a.m., she woke you up, and your laptop is in the next room. You know you have to check inventory and distribution and a million other things before you can commit to doing it. You (groggily) tell her all this. She has no time to wait, and she asks again if you think you can do it. You repeat that you have no idea; maybe. She says, "Oh, thank you so much. I really appreciate it. I'm at the airport, and I have to go."

You hang up the phone, and you know she heard you say that you would do it (even though you never said that). You're awake now, and you turn on the computer. There is no way, no possibility, no chance that you can do what she has asked. You try phoning her, but her voicemail message says that she is in Paris. The only way for you to contact her is to write an email that will be waiting for her when she arrives in Paris.

What would your email say?

I use this example often in my writing workshops. About 99.9 percent of participants write something like this:

Dear Dena,
Hope your trip was good. I checked, as I said I would, and there is no way I can get X done this week. Sorry! Safe travels.
Kory

Will Dena understand Kory's intent? What does his message say to her? (Remember the message the recipient hears and what the writer writes may be very different.)

- Why am I writing? *To say no!*
- What do I want to accomplish? *Get Dena off my back.*
- What do I want to say? (What is my motivation for writing?) *I have enough to do without worrying about this.*
- What is the next step? Will my reader know what the next step is, and who is to take that action? *There is no next step. See ya', wouldn't want to be ya'!*

If Kory had really felt that way, he could have saved himself time by not writing to Dena. Rather than dashing off an email that simply reacted to Dena's request, he could have achieved more if he had taken the time to consider what his goal was. With an understanding of both his intent (why he is bothering to write at all; what he hopes to achieve) and his message (what he wants to say), Kory can create a very different email—one that will get him the results he wants and the respect he deserves.

What do you think Kory's purpose was? Here is what I think Kory would have liked to achieve. (Your answers may be different. That is perfectly fine. I may have one purpose, and you may want to achieve something else. No problem. The only problem is not having a clear purpose, because then we can't possibly achieve it.)

- Why am I writing? *To tell Dena what her options are.*
- What do I want to say? *We can do half of X, we can make arrangements for another supplier to do X (without any quality guarantees), or we can provide Y and Z as options at the same cost (discount for her), or we can offer her A for*

slightly more money (many more bells and whistles—at a huge discount for her).

- What do I want to accomplish? (What is my motivation for writing?) *To maintain and build my relationship with Dena; to keep her as a happy client.*
- What is the next step? Will my reader know what the next step is, and who is to take that action? *I want Dena to email me back with her preferred option or another idea.*

Did Kory's original email give Dena her options? When Dena reads it, will she know what is possible or what is to happen next? Now it's Dena's turn to prewrite:

- Why am I writing? *To find out my options.*
- What do I want to say? *I need something done.*
- What do I want to accomplish? (What is my motivation for writing?) *To get something done with a decent supplier.*
- What is the next step? Will my reader know what the next step is, and who is to take that action? *Kory, get back to me with possibilities!*

Kory:

Please tell me what my options are for X. I'm not able to take care of this from here in Paris, and I need to get it done. Please do me a huge favor and email me as soon as you receive this so we can figure out a solution. If you prefer, I can call Gator, with the Mega Company.

Dena

How would you write the original email to Dena to avoid this email tag? I'll create my email for you in Chapter 3.

Sales Letters That Don't Sell!

Here is another example of what happens when a writer doesn't understand her or his purpose for writing (or even have a purpose). Read this actual sales letter (city and web site changed to protect the guilty) and decide for yourself whether the writer accomplished anything.

Dear Melinda,

Roseville is rapidly becoming a premier golf destination in the United States. Our perfect climate and abundance of golf courses make year-round golf available for both you and your meeting attendees. In order to help you think about Roseville when you think about golf, we've enclosed a special gift and an opportunity to qualify for an additional bonus.

As a fellow golfer, we're sure you appreciate the value of an established handicap. Enclosed please find a complimentary one-year membership to golf-r-usworld.com (a \$24.00 value). Log onto the web site and enter your password to begin your journey through the various offerings, including a course locator, golfing games, and the opportunity to establish a handicap by posting your individual scores.

If you respond by email, we'll personally send you a sleeve of Roseville-grown Pro V1 free-range golf balls. Justin Leonard and many other PGA tour professionals have trained these special balls. They're straight from this year's PGA tour at Champion National, and we invite you to take them out for a drive.

Our thanks in advance to you. We're looking forward to your response.

*Sincerely,
Matthew*

Does this letter sound good to you? It appears to be well written; that is, Matthew selected nice words (for the most part). The fact that it won't accomplish the writer's goals is a shame. Had Matthew taken a few moments to focus his thoughts, he could have created a terrific sales letter, one that would help him get the result he wants. Based on the letter he sent to Melinda (and most likely many other prospects), we can't be sure he accomplished anything except to waste his time writing and his reader's time deleting. He simply threw it all in there, using the "something will stick if you throw enough of it" theory.

By reading between the lines (something Melinda won't have time to do—nor should she be expected to), this is what I think he was trying to accomplish:

- Why am I writing? *To create excitement about the golf courses in Roseville so that Melinda, a meeting planner, will think about booking meetings there.*
- What do I want to say? *Roseville is a great destination with golf available all year—perfect destination, perfect destination, the most perfect destination for a meeting with golfers! Her attendees will love coming to Roseville!*
- What do I want to accomplish? (What is my motivation for writing?) *To make an offer to Melinda that is so compelling that she'll email me and we can start a relationship leading to her booking her meetings in Roseville.*
- What is the next step? Will my reader know what the next step is, and who is to take that action? *Melinda should email me to get a sleeve of cool golf balls and to find out more about Roseville.*

After prewriting—taking less than 2 minutes to answer the four questions—the letter becomes a cinch to write! How would you write to Melinda now that the purpose is clear? I'll write the letter for you in Chapter 3.

The technique of prewriting is as simple as buttering warm bread. Simple, however, doesn't mean easy. Prewriting is a new way of thinking about the writing process. It takes practice to change the habits you now have and replace them with a more efficient and more useful pattern. (It's worth it though. Remember that this three-step process can help you save up to 80 percent of the time you spend writing.)

Think about a sport you've played. Whether it's skiing, bowling, golf, or tennis, consider how you learned to play it and how you got better at it. If you took up the sport on your own, without formal instruction, you probably picked up some bad habits along the way. As you played more, the bad habits (even if you didn't know exactly what they were) hurt your game and limited your ability to succeed. You got by for a while with rudimentary skills and doing things in a less than perfect way (for example, snowplowing to stop instead of rolling the downhill ski, or gripping the club or racket in a more comfortable but less powerful position), and you enjoyed the thrill of the sport even if you weren't the best at it. At some point, however, you decided that you wanted to move to a different level.

You know that if you continue to do it the way you've always done it, you'll get the same results you've always had.

To improve, you hire an instructor, enroll in a class, and schedule a series of lessons. What is the message you are given over and

over again? “Forget the way you’ve been doing it. Leave your old habits behind.”

I’m that instructor, and this is that lesson. Prewriting, answering the questions before you write, is a powerful new habit that will give you better results than you ever imagined.

Take the Time to Write Your Answers

It’s important that you take the time to actually write your answers to the prewriting questions, rather than simply think about them. There are a few compelling reasons to type out your answers:

- You eliminate distractions and focus more efficiently. Picture yourself reading a menu in a restaurant. Think about all the things your brain does when you make a dinner selection. I know that my brain first considers how hungry I am (maybe a salad will be good), then how fattening the food choices are (yum, these nachos sound delicious, but with all that cheese, I don’t know) and how much other fattening food I’ve eaten that day (and I’ve already eaten a bagel with cream cheese, but it was low fat . . . maybe the nachos would be okay). I eliminate some items (forget the steak, way too heavy; don’t want meat anyway, but I could use some protein; maybe some chicken on those nachos) and start looking at prices (hey, this isn’t bad . . . this price is much better than it was at that place in California). I think about what I know about the particular restaurant (maybe I should just get a salad; I’ve never heard anything really good about the Mexican food here—after all, it’s just a grill), what it is known for (but the fajitas at the other table smell great,

maybe it's a specialty), where I had each item before (I know these nachos can't be as good as those at La Destileria in Cancún, but I'm not in Cancún), and whether it will at least be decent here (I bet it'll be okay). And it goes on and on. (Okay, nachos with chicken, please!)

You have just as many ideas floating through your brain when you write. Think about the millions of distractions you have. The phone is ringing, and even though you're letting it go into voice-mail because you have to get your emails written before the meeting, you can't help but wonder who just called because the phone ID said "caller unknown," and you have a meeting in 5 minutes and you reconsider whether you're fully prepared and whether sales quotas will be raised again, and you realize you haven't yet called the dentist to make an appointment for your son, and how will you ever get that team project finished with your vacation 3 days away, and now someone is popping his head into your cubicle, interrupting your interruptions! When you write (or type) the answers to the questions, you develop a "hand-brain pattern" and are able to shut out most of those competing thoughts.

When you actually write the words, you force your brain to focus on the one task at hand. You limit much of the noise around you, and you can focus more easily and more quickly on your purpose.

- You stay in the zone. Has this ever happened to you? You're writing, and the words are flowing. You're almost done with the letter, and then the dog nudges you wanting to go out, or your boss walks in to talk to you. When you get back to the message you were writing, you read it and reread it, and for the life of you, you can't remember what else you wanted to say!

If you take the time to write the answers to the prewriting questions, all you have to do is quickly review your answers, and—boom—you're back in that zone.

The four prewriting questions help you establish the true intent and message for your communication. Once you know why you're writing and what you must accomplish, it's easy to write and to get the result you want.

Knowing your purpose is the key to your writing success.

Writing Made Easy!

The beautiful part of writing is that you don't have to get it right the first time, unlike, say a brain surgeon.

Robert Cormier

Here is the second step in the three-step writing process. This is the easiest part: writing.

Because you've prewritten, you have a clear objective established. You know what your motivation for writing is and what you want to say. You have the next step plotted. The only thing you need to do now is write. Picture the person you're writing to and talk out your words on the screen. Don't worry if you ramble, or if your punctuation is the pits. Go for it! Talk out your words through your fingers. You can (and will) edit later. Right now, you are creating, easily, effortlessly, and efficiently.

Here is the deal: Writing is a simple creative step. People say awful things about writing because most of us have never learned to write. Remember having to write those 150-word compositions? It didn't matter if we could say everything that needed to be said in just 50 words; teacher said 150, and that's what it had to be. We

weren't taught how to write, only that we had to write. The more closely we could mimic the writing style of the teacher de jour, the better the grade we received.

Then, we get into the world of work and we need to quickly create a sales proposal or persuade someone to do something our way. The easiest thing to do is to copy whatever we find in the reader files that looks good! (It doesn't dawn on us until later that the person we're copying from copied from someone else, who had copied from someone else!)

Writer's block seems to be another issue when the discussion is powerful business writing. We won't struggle with writer's block if we use both the creative portion of our brain and the analytical portion appropriately.

Our brains are divided into two hemispheres: The creative portion creates, and the analytical part—yup, you guessed it—offers analytical and critical thought. Because writing—the physical act of putting the words on the page or screen—is a creative step, we needn't involve that critical part. When we do, we work harder than necessary. Picture driving a stick-shift car. Suppose each time you inched forward a bit (creative gear) you then had to go into reverse (analytical gear). You won't get very far that way, and you'll be extremely frustrated. That is exactly what we do to ourselves when we try to write and revise, or write and analyze, at the same time.

When we write, we need to quiet the analytical brain. If we don't silence it, it whispers (or shouts), "That's not any good. That's exactly what you wrote last time. You sound like a dummy. Change that."

Remind yourself that you will have a chance to revise, proof, and edit. That analytical portion of your brain will get its turn to criticize before you click on Send. But not now.

There is no need to edit or criticize or doubt yourself during the writing step. Work with only the creative portion of your brain during the second step of the three-step writing process.

Ignore all analytical whispers during this step. If you can't think of the exact word you want, for instance, don't stop the creative flow to start analyzing which word is best. Type the word *WORD* or use a line of dashes or a jumble of numbers or symbols (994372 - &^%\$#*) to indicate a place you'll need to pay attention to when you get to the third and final step of the writing process, the revision step. Don't waste your time trying to think of the perfect word during the creative step. Create during the creative step.

Writing is a three-step process. Prewriting is an analytical step. Writing is creative. Revision requires critical, analytical thinking.

Keep moving forward with your words, no matter what. Your message doesn't need to be perfect yet because there is a prewired opportunity to make it better. (This is why I love writing. We have the wonderful opportunity to revise and improve everything we write. When we speak, we don't have that luxury. Our listener hears, in real time, the incoherent words that spew from our mouths. There is nothing we can do—other than to try to extricate foot from mouth!)

Remember the email from Chapter 2 that Kory wrote to Dena? Now that Kory understands his purpose, he can easily and effortlessly move into the second step of the writing process and talk out what he wants to say.

To review, here are the answers to Kory's prewriting questions:

- Why am I writing? *To tell Dena what her options are.*
- What do I want to say? *We can do half of X, we can make arrangements for another supplier to do X (without any quality guarantees), or we can provide Y and Z as options at the*

same cost (discount for her), or A for slightly more money (many more bells and whistles—huge discount for her).

- What do I want to accomplish? (What is my motivation for writing?) *To maintain and build my relationship with Dena; to keep her as a happy client.*
- What is the next step? Will my reader know what the next step is, and who is to take that action? *I want Dena to email me back with her preferred option or another idea.*

Knowing what he needs to accomplish, Kory “talks” out his words:

Dena:

Hope your trip was great! I’ve looked into four options for you to get X accomplished. We can do half of X, we can make arrangements for another supplier to do X (without any quality guarantees), or we can provide Y and Z as options at the same cost as X, which is a huge discount for you, or we can offer you A at a significant courtesy discount (though A will still cost more because of the many bells and whistles built in).

Y and Z may be the cheapest deal for you. We know this accomplishes everything that X does, though the two functions take a lot more time. The price for both components should be higher but because you are a really important client, I can get them for you at the same price. Your deadline is a bit unreasonable but I’ll do what I can to have it there by your deadline. I should be able to because we just sent a shipment to another client in your area and they don’t need the entire shipment.

What will work best for you? Please email me to let me know which option works best for you, or if you have another idea.

Travel safe!

Kory

Is this the best email on record? No. No problem! We still have one more (analytical) step to go. Notice, however, that this letter achieves most of the writer's goals—to give Dena options, to move to a next step, and to focus on saving her as a client. (We'll work on the relationship aspect later in the book.)

The email is quick and easy to write because we had already taken the time to think through the point we were making. We didn't just write; we wrote to achieve results.

Sales Letters Should Sell

Do you remember the sales letter Matthew sent to Melinda (and all his other prospects) that offered her the sun, the stars, and the moon, too? (You can reread the letter in Chapter 2, if you'd like.) Here are the offers Matthew made: *“We've enclosed a special gift (a one-year membership) and an opportunity to qualify for an additional bonus; if you respond by email, we'll personally send you a sleeve of Roseville-grown Pro VI free-range golf balls.”*

Why is Matthew spending the money to enclose a gift if he doesn't know whether his reader is interested? What is he trying to achieve by qualifying her for an additional bonus? (How does she qualify, anyway? If she responds, how will Matthew know whether she is interested in booking in Roseville or whether she simply wanted the free Roseville-grown balls?) Why is he using all these gifts?

A quick review of the prewriting questions and answers reminds us that Matthew was trying to create buzz about the golf courses in Roseville. He wants to get Melinda to book her meetings in Roseville. He wants her to be so excited that she'll email him for more information, oh, and a sleeve of golf balls.

Matthew might write:

Dear Melinda,

Have golfers? Looking for a premier golf destination where they can play any time of the year? Looking for a meeting destination that everyone will enjoy because of its perfect climate, its wide range of hotels and meeting venues, and the ability to “play” outside all year round?

Roseville specializes in meetings that want to mix business with pleasure. With the abundance of excellent golf courses, your attendees can pick and choose where they'd like to unwind (or energize) after a day of intense meetings.

If you have meeting attendees who like to play golf, they will be so grateful to you for selecting Roseville. Here is what one meeting planner told us:

“The abundance of golf courses in Roseville made our off-site planning easy! Everyone was so delighted to be able to play even mid-winter! We'll be back!”

With your permission, I'd like to email you a PDF brochure to help you see how Roseville can make your next meeting memorable and fun. I'll follow up with you to answer questions and find out more about your meeting goals. Please click on Reply or email me at email@golfatRoseville.com to let me know if I may send you information about the exciting possibilities Roseville can offer your attendees.

To thank you for your emailed information request, I'll send you a sleeve of Roseville Pro V1 free-range golf balls. Justin Leonard and many other PGA tour professionals have used these special balls. They're straight from this year's PGA tour at Champion National.

Your golfers will thank you!

*Sincerely,
Matthew*

With this letter, Matthew no longer has to give away the store. He accomplishes his goal with less effort—and with much less expense—both in promotional “give away” gifts and in the time spent chasing unqualified leads (people who just want that sleeve of golf balls).

Powerful, coherent, results-oriented writing is the result of a conscious three-step process. Prewrite to know your purpose; write to get the message out of you and onto the paper. The next chapter is like the icing on the cake. The final step provides that extra attention that will ensure that your writing looks and sounds professional to your reader.

Once you know what you need to achieve, you can do it!
Talk out your message. Allow yourself to create without critique.

This page intentionally left blank.

Revision: Your Final Step

What makes men [and women] great is their ability to decide what is important, and then focus their attention on it.

Goethe

You took the time to prewrite (the first analytical step), so you're clear about the purpose of your document. Without worrying about creating the perfect document, you then talked out your words onto your computer screen. Another minute or two and you'll be ready to hit that Send button, confident that your reader will quickly and clearly understand your message and your intent.

You ignore this third step at the risk of losing your professional reputation. (Many people don't seem to care. They're just happy to have written anything, I guess.)

Here is an email that I received today. It is a follow-up to my visit to the organization's web site, and it is intended to make a sale (get me to register).

Dear sue Hershkowitz-coore,

We noticed that you visited the Planning for the Cactus Convention Association but did not register. If you would like to register now, you may go to: <https://www.one-stop-cactus.com>. If you have changed your mind or did not intend to register, please do not contact us, the information you entered will be automatically deleted after 24 hours.

You can re-register at any point after this 24 hours by going to CCA's web site and follow the links to the registration page.

Thank you!

CCA Registrar

“Registrar” (whoever that might be!) never bothered to complete the vital third step in the writing process (though from this email, it appears that he or she didn't use the first two steps either!). “Registrar's” professionalism is questionable, and because Registrar is writing on behalf of the association, its professionalism also becomes doubtful.

What is the absolutely, positively, compulsory and essential third step? The third step in the writing process is simply this: Proof, edit, and polish your writing before letting other eyes see it.

Later on in this book, we'll talk about reframing messages to help you present negative messages in neutral, acceptable terms. We'll cover how to write in a you-oriented manner. We'll discuss, in detail, three different formats to compel your reader to read. We'll eliminate outdated, useless language and replace it with word tracks that are conversational, persuasive, and easy to understand and act upon. Eventually, you'll consider all these techniques during this final stage (and they will be like second nature to you).

Right now, the third step requires only that you read (not look at for a brief moment, but read) your document to see if:

- What you wrote makes sense
- It accurately reflects your purpose for writing
- It is grammatical
- All spellings are correct

If you're not writing to get a result, why write? If you're not writing to build a relationship, why write? If you're not projecting your ideas, your product, and your service in the best possible light, why write? (Surely it doesn't make sense to lose points with the written word!) Be disciplined enough to take an extra minute or two to throw a critical eye on your writing.

This revision and proofing step requires the analytical portion of your brain to say, "Whoa! That sounds or looks really bad. Change it." It's always easier to edit than it is to write (and you've already done that), so go for it! Fix it. Improve it. Correct the stuff that doesn't track.

Check your punctuation and your spelling. In most cases, punctuation in email can be less formal than standard business writing habits have dictated. Less formal, however, doesn't mean nonexistent. Punctuation helps your reader read in the same way that a stoplight helps a driver drive. Read the last chapters of this book for specific punctuation tips to help you sound as professional, credible, and competent as you should.

Good writing is respectful of the reader's time. A rambling report, a poorly punctuated letter, a grammatically incorrect email screams to your readers, "I don't care about you and your time." Why would they want to do business with you after that?

Spell-checking Is Grate!

Eye halve a spelling chequer
 It came with my pea sea
 It plainly marques four my revue
 Miss steaks eye kin knot sea.

Eye strike a key and type a word
 And weight four it two say
 Weather eye am wrong oar write
 It shows me strait a weigh.

As soon as a mist ache is maid
 It nose bee fore two long
 And eye can put the error rite
 Its rare lea ever wrong.

Eye have run this poem threw it
 I am shore your pleased two no
 Its letter perfect awl the weigh
 My chequer tolled me sew.

Anonymous

Spell-checking. What a fabulous invention! Theoretically, we no longer need to know how to spell because our brilliant software program will do it for us. Though this is not exactly true, spell-checking is vital. Please (with sugar on top!) spell-check. Before you send any document, *no matter how insignificant an email may seem to be*, spell-check. People make very quick judgments about people who don't spell properly. Your reader doesn't know whether

you're simply illiterate and can't spell, or whether you don't care enough about him or her to take the time to check. You lose no matter what.

Spell-checking, however, is *not* enough! Spell-checking, however, is *not* enough! Spell-checking, however, is *not* enough!

What I see when I go into corporations to review the strengths and weaknesses of their documents is correctly spelled, incorrect word choices. Some are innocuous, like *manger* for *manager*. (This could be kind of cute in December.) I've seen the word *any* in place of the word *and*. (No big deal, unless it's a legal document, and then it could be a really, really big deal.)

They get much more embarrassing, however. Mary, the First Shift nurse, sent an email with her signature line saying:

Mary

First Shift nurse (with the letter *f* omitted from *shift*)

An island country's Commission on Tourism sent a letter welcoming guests. It was supposed to invite tourists "to the shores of our country." The commission omitted the first *s* from the word *shores*. (Tourism skyrocketed.)

A sales letter from a nonprofit requested donations to lower the "morality" rate. (Not only will I donate to that, I'll even drink to that!) The "mortality" rate is what the organization wanted to lower.

A southwestern state sent an email to thousands of people inviting them to attend a "Public Executive Program." The letter *l* was omitted from the word *Public*. It spell-checked perfectly (and I heard attendance was the best ever!).

Can you imagine being responsible for any of these horrors? I once sent out an email that said “I lie” instead of “I like.” My assistant misspelled “courtesy discount” on an agreement, preferring “curtsy.” A client emailed that she would make “aggravation at the hotel for me.” I hope she meant a “reservation.”

Believe me, these are funny only if you aren't the person who wrote them.

What can you do to limit the possibility of such embarrassment? Here are three ideas to help you:

- Change the look of your document when you proof it so that you can look at it with fresh eyes. (Ever notice how easy it is to catch the mistakes in someone else's work?) Change the screen background color, font color, or font type style. Print your document on paper of a different color from the paper you use all the time. If you always type with a white screen background, change it to yellow. If your corporate stationery is ivory, print your document on pink or green or even goldenrod. The more out of the ordinary you make your document look to your eyes, the more likely you'll be to spot errors.
- Change the pattern you use to read your words. Read from the last word to the first. Again, this practice helps you see the document with fresh eyes. It forces you to actually look at and see each individual word, rather than focusing on the content and taking in groups of words at one time.
- Partner with a friend. Swear each other to secrecy and use each other's eyes to catch the errors.

Revision is the final detail that shows your reader that you really do pay attention to the details. Unlike in speaking, where we cannot take back what we said, in writing we can improve upon our initial thoughts without anyone “hearing” our first draft. Writing allows us to look brilliant, professional, and polished.

By applying this last step to the email Kory wrote to Dena, we get the chance to eliminate nonessential information and revise phrasing that might be taken the wrong way.

Here, again, is the email created in the last chapter (without benefit of the revision step):

Dena:

Hope your trip was great! I've looked into four options for you to get X accomplished. We can do half of X, we can make arrangements for another supplier to do X (without any quality guarantees), or we can provide Y and Z as options at the same cost as X, which is a huge discount for you, or we can offer you A at a significant courtesy discount (though A will still cost more because of the many bells and whistles built in).

Y and Z may be the cheapest deal for you. We know this accomplishes everything that X does, though the two functions take a lot more time. The price for both components should be higher but because you are a really important client, I can get them for you at the same price. Your deadline is a bit unreasonable, but I'll do what I can to have it there by your deadline. I should be able to because we just sent a shipment to another client in your area and they don't need the entire shipment.

What will work best for you? Please email me to let me know which option works best for you, or if you have another idea.

Travel safe!

Kory

Had Kory sent this email to Dena using only the first two steps of the writing process (prewriting and writing) without the third step, Dena might have been offended by the way some points were phrased. In addition, in the third step, Kory has the chance to consider if Dena needs all the details he included and can delete useless information.

Dena:

Hope your trip was great. I've looked into four options for you to get X accomplished. We can do half of X, we can make arrangements for another supplier to do X (without any quality guarantees), or we can provide Y and Z as options at the same cost as X, or A for slightly more money.

Y and Z may be the best deal for you. We know this accomplishes everything that X does, though the two functions take an additional step. I can arrange to have Y and Z components there, by your deadline, at the same price as X. (This is a significant courtesy discount that we are pleased to offer you.)

Will this work for you? Would you prefer another option? If you would like me to go ahead with Y and Z, please email me by 6:00 p.m., NY time, Wednesday. After that time, it will be difficult to complete the arrangements for you.

Dena, please email me if you prefer another option. I'm in the field all this week and will have access to email only in the evening.

Travel safe!

Kory

Do you see the differences? Can you feel the change in attitude? Can you hear a relationship-building tone?

The third step of the writing process enables you to present yourself powerfully and professionally, without the worry that

something you've written will be misinterpreted and come back to haunt you.

To write powerfully, use the three-step writing process. Prewriting helps you to accurately pinpoint your message and intent. Writing allows you to creatively talk out your message, based on the results of the prewriting questions. Revising transforms your thoughts into a clear, coherent, and correct message.

This page intentionally left blank.



PART TWO

THE PSYCHOLOGY OF WRITING

Good writing is more than the mechanics of writing (though it is hard to write well if you don't know the difference between a comma and a period). It is understanding the psychology of the written word and its effect on the reader. It's knowing how to grab the reader's attention and how to compel her or him to read. It's knowing how to frame an idea and how to move the reader to action.

Good writers guide their readers on a journey, and their readers gladly follow. This section covers psychological formats for two different situations every business writer encounters:

- Sending routine, good news, or neutral emails or letters
- Writing to readers who will be upset or hostile about the information you're providing

This page intentionally left blank.

Writing Routine Messages

Business is fundamentally a conversation.

FastCompany, January 2003

Routine, good news, and neutral messages should never be confused with mystery novels. That seems pretty darn obvious, doesn't it? A good mystery novel provides the reader with clues, and finally, after many breathtaking pages of intrigue, the killer/stalker/bad person is exposed.

A good routine message, on the other hand, doesn't keep the reader in suspense. It provides the reader with the meat of the message and is out of there.

Do you see any similarity between the two genres? No, neither do I. So I can't figure out why this sales executive (and thousands of others), when asked to make a recommendation, would write this way:

Paul,

Based upon your request for a recommendation for a Valentine promotional product within the 0.55 to 0.63 price point range, I looked into eight excellent options. After reviewing the choices, ranging from Valentine Skateboard Key Chains to Plastic Smile Face Heart Dancing Bookmarks, to Fuzzy and Pink Valentine Pencils, I was able to eliminate six of them based on your selection criteria from last year and my knowledge of your client base.

The two remaining choices have many advantages and few disadvantages. The Plastic Smile Face Heart Balloon Derby Cars are new and fun. They will be a huge hit with your clients, particularly if a colleague receives one, enabling them to race each other. They are likely to display the Derby cars prominently on their desk (so they can zoom them around the desk when dealing with a particularly long phone call!). The main disadvantage is that they will require special postage rates and a special mailing box/envelope to ensure that the postal service doesn't crush the plastic car.

The other item, the Plastic Valentine Bulls-Eye Game, has been around for many years. It is a game of coordination, and "children of all ages" just can't seem to put it down. It's easy to get hooked on trying to make that bulls-eye. These games are easy to ship and difficult to crush or break, though they will require additional postage and a larger mailing envelope.

I think you will get more bang for your buck by selecting the Derby Racing Cars. No one has seen them before. For your most important clients, I suggest boxing two cars together (I know this doubles your cost, but the impact will be awesome).

Please email me to let me know what you decide. More information on both of these items can be found on our web site, www.PlasticPlasticPlastic.com.

Henry

Think about this email for a minute. What did Paul ask from Henry? Did Paul want to know what he shouldn't order, or what he should? If Henry is getting paid by the word, he did a bang-up job. Most salespeople don't get paid by the word, however. We get paid when we build good, solid relationships with our customers and clients. We get paid when our customers buy from us (over and over again). We get paid when our customers appreciate and value our expertise, our product, and our service and let others know that we can help them, too.

Henry could have had Paul eating out of his hand. Paul already trusted him. After all, he initiated the call to ask for Henry's advice. But poor Henry—he felt that he had to both justify his recommendation and let Paul know how much effort and attention he had put into making this selection for him.

If Henry had answered the prewriting questions, he would have known what to write:

- Why am I writing? *To recommend the Valentine Plastic Smile Face Heart Balloon Derby Racing Cars.*
- What do I want to say? *The Derby Racing Cars will give you the best bang for the buck; they're new and fun; you can double them up to make a really great impact; will need special packaging.*
- What do I want to accomplish? (What is my motivation for writing?) *To continue to build my relationship with Paul and sell him the best Valentine promo for his needs.*
- What is the next step? Will my reader know what the next step is, and who is to take that action? *Ask Paul to email me with his approval. (Author's note: I rarely expect my client to get back to me. How dare I ask my clients*

to do the work that I'm getting paid to do for them! However, I'm answering these questions based on the letter that Henry actually sent to Paul.)

This situation sounds like a routine message to me, not a mystery novel! Paul asked, "What do you recommend?" and all Henry needed to do was answer the question: "I recommend the Derby Racing Cars because . . ." Henry chose to write a mystery novel.

All routine, neutral, and good news letters, emails, proposals, and reports begin with the main idea; they lead with the primary reason for writing.

If the writer chooses to offer additional information, believing that the reader may want to know more, he can justify, pontificate, or belabor the point for 1000 pages or more (in an attachment) if he wants to! As long as the writer starts with the main idea and *follows* it with the detail and backup information, the reader gets to choose how much (or how little) of this information she will read.

In a routine type of message, the reader—not the writer—determines how much background information she needs to read.

When you have good news to send or a routine message to relate, start with the main idea.

When Would a Salesperson Use This Format?

Every salesperson on the planet sells more when the customer or client trusts and respects him or her. Customers who are treated respectfully typically trust the seller more. Great salespeople always treat the other person with honor and respect. Part of this respect-

fulness is showing concern for the value of the customer's time. It would infuriate me, for instance, when I would take my dog to the veterinarian. Our appointment would be scheduled for 1:45 p.m., and the vet would sashay in about 2:20 p.m. and offhandedly say, "Oh, sorry, busy day." What was the message I heard loud and clear? She thought her time was more important than mine (not to mention my dog, Buster's!). (See Chapter 10 for an explanation of why you never apologize in writing.)

Just as the veterinarian showed little regard for the value of my time, we disrespect our readers when we disregard their time. Why drag me through four permutations of your thoughts when all I want to know is: Do you have the system that will work best for me? You may find these permutations fascinating, but I just want an answer. You may want to justify why it took you 2 days to compile the data and you may want to get credit for all the research you did. I'll know you did a great job when you give me the information I need—with respect for my time.

Use Plan A, the routine document formula:

- After you meet with a client and she asks you to send information
- After a phone conversation with a customer in which he asks if you have the product that he needs in stock, and you do, and you want to confirm that you can ship it by a certain date, or you have the meeting space she needs, or you can match the advertising rates he's been paying
- After the deal is signed, when you need additional information to get the project moving forward
- Whenever you have good news or a routine report for your manager

- When you have any simple message that will not cause your reader to be stressed out, rejected, angry, frustrated, or hostile (see Plan B for these)

If your client asks if you have the Royal Palms Room available for her December 28 wedding, and you check, and you have it available, start with:

Great news! The Royal Palms Room is available for your December 28 wedding!

If your customer calls to ask you to email information and prices about your printing services, start with:

Thanks for your call this morning. I'm attaching the information and price list you requested. I'll follow up with you January 13 to talk about how we can make your life easier and get your printing completed accurately and on time.

If your customer has complained that the shipment she received is incorrect, and you sent another shipment today, start with:

Your new shipment was shipped by FedEx today, and will be delivered to your Thomasville warehouse before 2:00 p.m. tomorrow. The tracking number is . . .

If your client asks if his elite Platinum status can be extended even though he didn't earn enough points this year to maintain the status, and you agree to extend it, start with:

Congratulations! Your Elite Platinum status has been extended through 2006. We are delighted to make this exception for you.

Plan A is easy and efficient. Use it when you know your reader will be happy, or at least neutral, about your message.

Plan A isn't a good idea when you need to persuade someone to accept your point of view.

When your prospect, customer, or colleague from the other department is already interested in what you have to offer, Plan A is a great way to give them additional information. When you need to be persuasive, when you need to sell your idea, when they need to be convinced that this information is important to them, Plan A is not the best format for your message.

Plan A is perfect when people know you and like you, and you need to follow up with them.

Plan A isn't the best format choice when you have bad news to convey.

Plan A, beginning with the main idea, is a bad, bad, bad idea when your message is bad for the reader. If you're announcing a price increase, it's not a terrific idea to begin with, "Effective immediately, our prices will leap by 10 percent."

That may be your main idea, but it won't win friends or influence people!

Think about the psychological effect when you format your message. When you know your reader will be pleased or will readily accept your message, Plan A is your best format choice. When you have to convince them that your information is good for them, choose a different format.

This page intentionally left blank.

Plan B:

Writing to Hostile Readers

Great leaders are always great simplifiers who can cut through argument, debate and doubt to offer a solution everyone can understand.

Colin Powell, Secretary of State

Hostile readers. What an unsavory term to describe those people whom you've disappointed, frustrated, aggravated, and, in general, annoyed (through real or imaginary actions) to such a degree that when they receive mail from you, they read it with a chip on their shoulder.

Hostile readers can be those sales associates you manage who, because they never seem to get their paperwork in on time, will no longer receive their commission checks until they complete all outstanding paperwork that is 30 days old or older. (My guess is that this new policy will annoy them. What do you think?)

Hostile readers can be those customers whom you promised absolute on-time delivery of their printing job, but who had to leave for the trade show without their printing because you experienced a major press breakdown.

Hostile readers can be those clients who agreed to an attrition clause when they (and you) expected no problem with attrition. Because of world events, they had a huge drop-off in their numbers, and you need them to live up to the agreement they made with you.

In general, hostile readers are those people who either have been disappointed by something you've done or are annoyed at something you're doing.

Your new policy (or your rejection of their idea, denial of their claim, etc.) may seem perfectly reasonable—to you. It may require only a minimum of change and make a world of sense—to you.

Here is the deal: It doesn't matter what you think about the message you send. If your reader is likely to be unhappy or displeased with what you have to say, Plan B is the most powerful way to present that message.

Imagine that you've been late to work for 4 days in a row. (For some of you, this may not be difficult.) You get an email from your manager, and all it says is:

You've been late to work four times this week. This is not acceptable behavior.

What is your reaction? I don't know how nice you are, but I'd be tempted to respond: *Pay me more. I'll buy a helicopter, avoid all the traffic, and be here on time, your majesty. By the way, I meet my quota, don't I? Why don't you talk to Sean? He is here on time every*

day, but he couldn't sell water in the desert. And speaking of the desert, I'm going to Arizona on vacation next week. I won't just be late. I won't even be here.

When someone attacks us, our bodies immediately respond to the threat of danger. Our immediate and primitive response is to either fight the attacker or flee from the situation. (This is that “fight or flight” phenomenon we learned about in Psych 101.) Verbal and written attacks have the same initial effect on our system as the threat of a physical attack.

Powerful writers understand that it is more than the literal words used that sways a reader, prospect, spouse, friend, colleague, or boss in one direction or another. The way in which those words are presented has a huge effect on their acceptability and the response they elicit.

The biggest challenge a writer has is to make certain that her words are understood the way she intended them to be understood.

Preventing the Deadly Metacommunication

Words on a page or screen are “dead.” With no voice inflection, no eye contact, and no body language to help a reader grasp the words in the way the writer intends, the burden is on the writer to write so the reader cannot misunderstand. A powerful writer does everything possible to write in a way that doesn't permit misinterpretation, or metacommunication. Yet even the best writer won't know what mood or circumstance the reader is in when he or she reads the message. The reality is that it is almost impossible to entirely eliminate metacommunications. The successful writer works hard to limit the potential for misunderstanding.

Meanings lie. Meanings lie in people. Meanings lie in people, not in words.

As I was leaving for a meeting, I asked my assistant to create an agreement for the client, and I told her the client file was on her desktop. I said, “The file is on your desktop.”

When I returned from my meeting, I noticed that her desk was much neater and more organized than it had been when I left. I looked at my desk, and it, too, had been straightened. Within a second she approached me and said, “I looked all over my desktop and I looked all over yours, and the file is definitely not on either desktop!” No wonder they’d been straightened! I meant computer desktop, not wooden desktop. Duh! It was my fault, however, not hers, that I didn’t express myself in a way that couldn’t be misunderstood.

On Halloween last year, a friend and I were meeting at the local dog park to let our dogs play while we gossiped. Earlier that day, she had been having lunch with a client. When he asked her, “Do you have any special plans for Halloween?” she replied, “Yes, a friend and I are going to the dog park.” “Oh, you like gambling on the dogs?” After a few moments of total misconnect, she laughed and said, “We’re not going to the racetrack Dog Park, we’re going to the dog park where we can let our dogs run off leash and play with the other dogs!”

These metacommunications happen all the time in normal conversation, even when we can hear the other person’s inflection and intonation and even when we are looking directly at each other. As you can imagine, they happen much more often in writing, and most frequently in email writing.

Words by themselves have little meaning. We imbue them with meaning based on our interpretation of them. We use the same words at different times to mean different things. I can say, “Fine” (and be delighted) when my husband says he wants pizza for dinner. (Yippee, I don’t have to make dinner!) I can say, “Fine” (and not mean it) when my husband says he can’t get out of a meeting and won’t be able to go with me to the furniture store. I can say, “Fine” (and mean it—but differently!) when a girlfriend points out a particularly good looking male.

When you email me in response to my request for an advance, and you write, “Fine. Let’s talk when you get back,” I can interpret that to mean, “Excellent idea. When you get back, we’ll talk about a new advance policy and maybe about increasing your salary, too. You’re worth it!” Or, I can interpret it to mean, “You have really annoyed me with this request, and we need to discuss this and your inability to work within the company guidelines. We may have to talk about your low sales figures while we’re at it, too.” (And your legal department may interpret it as a binding agreement.)

To get the results you want, and the recognition and respect you deserve, write in such a way that your reader gives them to you. Make it as easy as possible for the reader to understand your point, feel positive about your idea, and agree to follow through on the action you want.

This page intentionally left blank.

The Buffer Zone

Would you rather be right or happy?

Tom Crum

Dear Mom and Dad:

I'm sending you this email from a friend's computer because my computer was destroyed in the fire in my apartment. Just the other day, I got out of the hospital and moved in with Joe, my boyfriend. Your new grandbaby is due next fall.

Your loving daughter, Teresa

P.S. None of the above is true. I did, however, make a D in Chemistry and an F in Greek, and I wanted you to see this in its proper perspective.

It makes good sense not to walk up to someone and say, "You're ugly and I need a favor." It makes just as much good sense to avoid beginning a disappointing message to a disappointed (or worse)

reader with the bad news. Your reader will be as accepting of your message as the person you just called ugly!

Prepare your reader to accept the disappointing or “bad” news by beginning with a buffer.

Some people confuse the word *buffer* with the word *bull*. These people think they have to be sweet like sugar, or that they must somehow be manipulative if they are to get their way. They might write something like this:

Sadie:

You did a great job with the Bahamian project, and I applaud you for the work you’ve done so far on Nantucket. I’m glad Rupert suggested that you join the team. It’s been nice getting to know you better. You’ve shown great team spirit, commitment, and enthusiasm, and if that is needed anywhere, it’s needed on this new project. Nantucket is a huge project and very important to the reputation of this company. The fact is, however, that the concept for Nantucket is entirely different from the Bahamian project, and you’ve shown no originality whatsoever . . .

Merlin

Merlin’s “bull” is obvious. He did nothing but patronize Sadie. His attempt at softening the message is almost as bad as the totally opposite approach:

Sadie:

This is junk. Be more original for Nantucket.

Merlin

A buffer opens the door and beckons the reader to continue reading. A buffer shows integrity and authenticity. It creates an inviting path for the reader. A good buffer is both sincere and honest and helps you, the writer, get the result you want.

When responding to a complaint, for example, appropriate buffers could be “Thank you for taking the time to write” or “Thank you for giving me the opportunity to explain this situation.”

Both of these are authentic, honest sentiments, aren't they? A customer has a complaint, and she took the time to let you know what displeased her. She has given you the opportunity to explain the situation so that you can educate her, satisfy her, and win her back. You are thankful, aren't you? By understanding and acting on her complaint, you have the chance to retain a happy customer. (This doesn't mean, by the way, that you must give her something when she is wrong.) Your words of thanks are sincere.

A buffer gives your reader the chance to feel good (or neutral) about the situation. It gives him the chance to “save face” rather than feeling that he must immediately defend his ideas, his position, or his stance.

Whether you are writing internally or externally, the easier you make it for your reader to feel okay about a difference of opinion, the more likely you will be to get your desired result.

Here is a truth (and I didn't have to be the sharpest knife in the drawer to come up with this): If you offend, annoy, or put off your readers or make them feel uncomfortable, they're likely to delete your message without reading it to its conclusion. If they don't read what you've written, you have no chance of getting what you want.

Merlin would have had better success with Sadie if he had buffered the bad news, instead of trying to throw the bull:

Sadie:

Thanks so much for your ideas on how to move forward with Nantucket. Your creativity was the cornerstone for the success of the Bahamian project, and we need that type of originality to make Nantucket work.

The Nantucket project requires a different direction to be successful. Our presentation to the client is next Monday. I'll need fresh designs ready by Thursday, so that you and I can meet with Rupert to discuss our strategy. Will Thursday morning or afternoon work best for you?

Please let me know what time on Thursday works and I'll coordinate with Rupert. We'll need a couple of hours to work together on the final presentation.

Merlin

Be Positive Even If You Feel Like Screaming

Some writers just can't stand the dichotomy of being positive and friendly when what they really want to say is, "F--- you and your mama, too!"

My advice for writers who are angry or frustrated and just can't seem to get over the injustice of the situation (when you have practically worked yourself to death, for instance, doing everything possible for the client, bending over backwards, pulling favors, missing dinner with the family, and he still complains) is this: Don't worry about being positive!

Write the letter—on paper, not on a computer—the way you want to. Call the person every name in the book (if that is your style). Yes, swear at him, and at his mama, his dog, and his entire family tree, if that makes you feel better. Write about every single thing he ever did that you know of that was stupid, mean, thoughtless, and way less than professional. List everything you’ve done to please him. Get all the venom and hostility out of your system and onto that paper (not screen!). Then, when you’re sure it’s totally out of you, when you have written it all down, shred the document. Throw part of it away in one trash can, another part in another trash can, and another part in still another trash can. Burn it, in fact, if you won’t set off the fire alarm.

This catharsis, this purging of your negativity, allows you to regain your balance and write more professionally and with a positive purpose. Even the sweetest among us will have trouble keeping the bile down and the sarcasm in check when we feel we’ve been wronged. Every woman (and even a few men) understands that talking out an issue—not necessarily solving it, just talking it out—makes it easier to understand and handle. Talk out your anger on the page. Get it out of you so that you can move on.

The Buffer Is a Bridge

The buffer is a bridge that allows your readers to move from, “What the heck can she possibly say that will mean anything to me?” to a more positive reaction like, “That *is* true,” or “That was nice,” or some other kind thought that motivates them to keep reading instead of immediately hitting the delete button.

Do you remember the situation from the previous chapter—the one where you’ve been late to work 4 days in a row? Your manager sent you this email:

You've been late to work four times this week. This is not acceptable behavior.

Do you think you might be less defensive if he had started with:

Core working hours are 8:00 a.m. to 3:30 p.m. The sales team selected these hours when we made the change to company-wide flextime last year.

Isn't this buffered opening less likely to provoke a nasty comment on the part of the reader and more likely to evoke a positive response, such as, "Yeah, that's true."

Buffers neutralize a hot situation. They aren't manipulative; they're smart.

How would you buffer this message? Last year, your company instituted a policy requiring a 50 percent deposit on all orders. One long-time client has refused to make the appropriate deposit. Until last month, you delivered to her anyway. You kept telling her that delivery would stop in November (13 months after the policy was instituted) unless she paid the appropriate deposit. You left a voice-mail for her 2 days before she was expecting her November delivery. You reminded her that the order had never been confirmed because no deposit had been received, and so there would be no delivery.

You're on the road, and you get a furious (make that livid) voice message from her. Without your delivery she can't deliver to her customers, and she screams, "You will ruin me."

You are three time zones away, and because you know she has left the office and you won't have a chance to talk until tomorrow morning, you email her.

How would you buffer this message? Part of the answer depends on what you hope to accomplish with your email. (Always begin by knowing your purpose.)

- Why am I writing? *To get her compliance with the policy so that she can get her delivery.*
- What do I want to say? *We can deliver within 24 hours, but we can't deviate from the policy any longer. She is getting an awesome rate because everyone else is adhering to the deposit prepayment requirement.*
- What do I want to accomplish? (What is my motivation for writing?) *Keep her as a customer.*
- What is the next step? Will my reader know what the next step is, and who is to take that action? *She confirms delivery with a deposit so that we can deliver.*

The email could start with this buffer:

Your delivery can be arranged within 24 hours—maybe even more quickly. (*Buffer*)

For the past 12 months, the new policy has allowed us to keep our prices significantly lower than every competitor because we can manage our cash flow efficiently. Every one of our customers benefits from the price savings this new deposit requirement allows us to offer. (*Education*)

You've been a loyal customer to us, and because of that loyalty, we've been happy to provide a 12-month extension to you. (*Education*) We can deliver your shipment within 24 hours after receiving your 50 percent deposit. (*Bad news*)

Buffers often accomplish their purpose (calming the reader and encouraging him or her to read further) in one sentence. At other times, the buffer flows into additional points of information and education to move your reader to the “bad news.” In this last example, the writer used a simple, one-sentence buffer (*Your delivery can be arranged within 24 hours—maybe even more quickly*). The additional education was helpful to the reader. Without belaboring the point, the writer moved the reader from what was a very frustrating situation to a very easy solution.

To get the result you want, focus on soothing your reader with a sincere and truthful buffer. Remember, without the reader’s buy-in, you get nothing done. By making it reasonable for your reader to continue reading and agree with your train of thought, you increase your chances of maintaining a good working relationship and getting the result you want.

Delivering the Bad News Positively, Persuasively, and Professionally

In communicating, the first question has to be, “Is this communication within the recipient’s range of perception? Can he receive it?” . . . If communication fits in with the aspirations, the values, the purposes of the recipient, it is powerful. If it goes against his aspirations, his values, his motivation, it is likely not to be received at all, or, at best, to be resisted.

Peter Drucker

Parker, your top producer, has had the same territory for 5 years. He has built strong, loyal relationships, and he gets his new business from referrals from his satisfied customers. To align your operation with the company’s new strategic initiative to increase long-term profitability, you must reassign about 50 percent of his

territory. Parker works out of his home office in another state. Your travel schedule is incredibly hectic for the next month, and you want to let him know about the change before the sales meeting next week. You decide to email him the news.

Use the four prewriting questions to determine your purpose:

- Why am I writing? *To keep Parker working with us; to get buy-in for the new plan.*
- What do I want to say? *Strategic changes in company direction will help us survive this economic downturn.*
- What do I want to accomplish? (What is my motivation for writing?) *To keep Parker and to keep him as happy as possible.*
- What is the next step? Will my reader know what the next step is, and who is to take that action? *Parker emails me to let me know when he will be getting in so that we can talk about his opportunities.*

Parker:

You've worked hard over the past 5 years to develop profitable relationships within your territory. I am hopeful that we have let you know, through the bonuses, recognition, and incentive trips you've earned, how much we appreciate—and continue to value—your success in your region. (*Buffer*)

The company's strategic direction, based on a very hard look at many different factors, requires major changes ranging from operational/administrative layoffs to reassigned sales territories. All of this will be announced at our sales meeting next week. (*Education—selling your idea*)

Because you are our top salesperson, I wanted you to know before the meeting that your territory is affected by some of

these changes, giving you about 12 percent more opportunity than you've had. You will pick up the eastern region adjacent to your territory and a small part of the western region. The northern portion of your territory, from X to Y, will continue to be yours to parlay. The southern portion will be reassigned. (*Bad news in positive terms*)

Parker, I know the eastern area has incredible potential for you, and you are the best one to make this happen. You have my commitment that I will do everything I can to make this transition smooth and profitable for you. (*Education*)

I'm out of the office until the sales meeting, with customer dinners scheduled every night this week. Please let me know what time you will arrive in Nashville so that we can talk about the new opportunities for you. (*End friendly and cooperatively*)
Sarah

Parker may not be thrilled by this information, no matter how he hears it. Sarah did the best she could, however, by buffering the message, educating Parker on the reasons the “bad” news is happening, providing further explanation and education, and ending friendly and cooperatively.

What if Sarah had written to Parker:

Effective next Wednesday, your territory will change to . . .

Without the buffer and the clear explanation, Parker's initial reaction could be both negative and angry.

Over the years, some workshop participants have insisted that they don't like it when their bad news is “sugar-coated.” I agree. The buffer should not sound like a day at the amusement park. It

should, however, prepare the reader so that he or she will continue to read rather than trashing the letter or email before understanding the situation.

Sarah buffered effectively and presented the changes as positively as she could. She told Parker what he would have (*You will have about 12 percent more opportunity than you've had. You will pick up the eastern region adjacent to your territory and a small part of the western region. The northern portion of your territory, from X to Y, will continue to be yours*) before specifying what would be taken away.

Effective writers provide good news before bad news. Every salesperson knows that when you move your prospect into a more positive mood, when you get the prospect using positive words (like “yes!”), that prospect is more likely to continue in a positive frame of mind and to continue saying yes.

Sandwich bad news with explanation and justification to help your reader more fully understand the situation.

Present the Bad News Nicely

If someone dies, there probably isn't a way to spin the sad information, nor should you even try. Short of death, however, almost every message can be presented to help the reader see the glass as half full instead of half empty.

I was working in a publishing plant in Kingsport, Tennessee. At the time, there were signs posted in the plant about every 5 feet that said, “Don't run.” I was walking with a VP, and I asked him, “Do you want people to walk? Maybe you could tell them what you do want them to do (Please Walk), instead of what you don't!”

Tell them what you want, not what you don't want.

Tell them what criteria need to be met, not what weren't met.

Tell them what is possible, not what is impossible.

Tell them what you can do or what they can have, not what you can't do or what they can't have.

If a client emails you requesting five complimentary rooms for every ten paid room nights, and your policy is one complimentary room for every ten paid room nights, tell him what you can do (one for ten) instead of what you can't. (Stay away from negatives like: that is not possible; our policy doesn't permit; we can't, etc.).

If you are booked this week or this year and can't accommodate a client, but you are available next week or next year, tell her so. Instead of emailing, "I'm booked on your preferred date," try, "I'm available the day before and the day after your requested date. Will either of these dates work for you? I'm confirmed to speak in Steamboat Springs on the 12th." Tell your reader what is possible and what can happen rather than what can't.

If you can grant only a 2 percent discount instead of the 20 percent the client wants, tell the client what you can do. (We are pleased to offer you a 2 percent courtesy discount. This is the maximum discount offered to any client.)

A negative message, effectively written, is no longer negative. It simply is what it is, and the negative connotations are eliminated. By helping your readers understand what is in it for them, or why the situation exists as it does, you help them move forward and you enjoy the results, recognition, and respect you deserve.

An effective negative message begins with a buffer to motivate the reader to continue to read, continues with education to help

her or him grasp the situation, then follows with the bad news in the most neutral or positive terms possible to help the reader accept the reality. The bad news is followed by additional clarification to help the reader clearly acknowledge the situation or take the next step.

Without giving your readers what they want, you still keep them positive and thinking favorably about you and the business relationship because you help them reach higher ground.

End Friendly and Cooperatively

All lasting business is built on friendship.

Alfred A. Montapert

You cannot shake hands with a clenched fist.

Golda Meir

How do you end a letter of rejection without resorting to stuffy and stilted phrases like, “If I can be of further assistance, please do not hesitate to call me”?

When you and your reader are on the same page (so to speak) because you’ve successfully prepared her for the bad news and presented the message in the most positive light possible, you should avoid the old insincere clichés and complete the message by offering to make her life easier.

Think about what you can do to take away some of the burden the reader is experiencing because of your refusal, rejection, or change in plans. Does she need additional education to fully comprehend the situation? Does she require an alternative strategy to pursue in order to move forward? Can you help her coordinate a new meeting, offer her a different deadline, or suggest a new plan?

The more you can help her out of her dilemma, the easier you make it for her to move forward and give you the result you want, the faster she will do so.

Say What You Mean and Mean What You Say

A bank I once worked with would send out a form rejection letter when it rejected a request for a loan. It would buffer the bad news, educate the reader about how a bank makes these difficult decisions, present the bad news in neutral terms, and then end with, “If we can be of further assistance, please do not hesitate to call us.” Talk about putting salt in the wound! From the readers’ perspective (the rejected ones), the bank hadn’t been of assistance to begin with—why would they call it now?

Never ask for something you don’t want to have happen.

Had the bank offered an alternative to the rejection—had it suggested a new review as soon as the reader had 3 months of pay stubs, had been out of jail for at least 6 months, or had completed bankruptcy papers—the offer (please call so that we can be of further assistance) could have made sense.

Ending friendly and cooperatively can mean that your reader knows what the next step is and who will be accountable for taking it, or understands (really understands) that you have his or her best interest at heart.

Which of these closing statements meet those two criteria?

- “Thanking you in advance for your anticipated cooperation.”
- “I’ll follow up with you Friday to answer questions and work with you to make this happen as seamlessly as possible.”
- “If you have any questions, do not hesitate to call me at any time.”
- “Please email me which alternative works best for you, and I’ll get started on the design.”

“Thanking you in advance for your anticipated cooperation”—or any variation of that outdated sentiment—no longer works as an effective or powerful closing. First, how can you “thank someone in advance”? Who are we to think that we can thank someone before that person has done anything, and think that it will be accepted as heartfelt? Thank people when you mean it, not before the fact.

Do you remember receiving a thank-you for a job well done? What type of note comes to mind? A handwritten letter or email thanking you for a job you completed well, or a sentence tacked on to the end of the directive telling you what you need to do, “thank-you in advance” for the job you’re about to complete?

Every one of us appreciates appreciation. Management guru Tom Peters, in a newspaper column, said he believes that he can

track our eventual financial worth by how often we take the time to send written notes of appreciation for what others do for us. His “thank-you” model is awesome: He clears his desk 20 minutes before he goes to lunch, 5 days a week, no matter where in the world he is. He doesn’t answer the phone or run through his email. All he does during that 20-minute period is handwrite thank-you notes.

Think about how pleasant it is when we’re appreciated. I know I’m more eager to work with someone again when that person has taken the time to say thank you. Do you feel the same way?

Simply tacking on “Thanking you in advance yada yada yada” is not the same as sending a separate thank-you note. Whether the message is negative to the reader or not, sincerity is important. Eliminate clichés. Prefer saying something of substance.

“If you have other questions, please call” can work under three circumstances:

- When you mean it
- When you think it’s best that the person call you rather than your following up with him or her
- When you don’t use the outdated phrase “please do not hesitate”

When you think it will be helpful for people to phone you, invite them to do so. Be even more helpful, if you can. Give them your direct phone line or your email address or tell them a good time to reach you. The more specific you are, the less this sentence sounds like an overused sentiment, and the more you help your reader.

Get rid of “please do not hesitate to call” as a word track option. I think that particular cliché has been around since ole Ben Frank-

lin (Your humble servant, Ben). What do you think your reader is going to do when he reads that phrase? Do you think it motivates him to jump on his desk and pump his fist in the air, screaming, “Yippee! I don’t have to hesitate!”?

Be friendly. Be courteous. Be gracious. And be real. Get rid of the stuff that clogs up the point. Add stuff that helps your reader get your point. [Try writing: If you have questions about the loan process, please call me on my direct line (555-555-5555). The best time to get me in the office is between 9:00 a.m. and noon, Tuesdays, Wednesdays, and Fridays.]

Use clear, fresh, specific language to end your message. By closing documents—both bad news and good news—in a friendly and cooperative manner, you help your readers get what they need and enable them to give you the result you require.

This page intentionally left blank.

Never Say You're Sorry

The first thing we do; let's kill all the lawyers.

William Shakespeare, *Henry VI, Part II*

Years ago there was a romantic book and movie called *Love Story*. Rent the video if you want to know the whole story. The point that matters here is that as the female lead (Ali McGraw) is dying, her husband (Ryan O'Neal) starts apologizing for a bunch of stuff. She stops him and (poignantly and tearfully) says, "Love means never having to say you're sorry."

Whether love means that or something different is up to you. Not saying you're sorry is a great business practice, however, and one that you should strictly adhere to when you communicate in writing.

Before this idea makes you nuts, please understand that I recognize that most of us were raised to say three magic phrases: please, thank you, and I'm sorry. With these social courtesies mastered, we were assured that life would go forward like a bowl of cherries. As children, we got out of all sorts of predicaments using those magic

phrases. We could forget to brush our teeth and lie that we did, and if we told our mommy “I’m sorry,” we could still get a bedtime story read to us. We could flush our goldfish down the toilet, and if the “I’m sorry” was accompanied by tears, and we were under the age of 5, nothing much happened to us.

“I’m sorry” was the perfect phrase until around the age of 8. Then they changed the rules on us. We got new, more complicated requirements. We still needed to apologize, but all of a sudden, we had to accompany the apology with a different plan for the next time—what we would do better or differently instead of repeating the wrong behavior.

If we wrecked the car, saying “I’m sorry” was no longer the panacea it once was. If we cheated on a test, “I’m sorry” didn’t mean much. If we forgot to let the dog out because we stayed out with friends and he pooped all over the rug, “I’m sorry” wasn’t going to save us.

Yet when we get into the world of business, we somehow think that “I’m sorry” will still work for us. We believe it will cover for us when we don’t deliver, when we don’t do things right, when we’re late, when we mess up, and, as Yul Brenner said in *The King and I*, “et cetera, et cetera, et cetera!”

The apology slides off our lips. And it’s true, we are sorry. But—drum roll, please—our apology, no matter how sincere, doesn’t fix the situation. It may make us feel better to say it; after all, we’ve been saying it for years (and typically with pretty good results).

When we are late with a proposal and our manager is furious, what do we expect is going to happen when we say, “I’m sorry”? Will she say, “Oh, that’s okay, sweet pumpkin”? Get real! What will help her feel better: our sincere apology or a time when she can expect the proposal?

When we go over budget on our expenses, what helps the client? Is it our sincere apology or a plan to stay within budget?

What our customers, colleagues, and managers need is a focus on a solution to the problem we created for them, rather than our apology. By focusing on solving the problem (that caused the need for the apology), we move the situation forward to resolution.

Lawyers, Litigation, and Liability

There is another critical reason to avoid apologizing in writing: Once you admit your wrongdoing and put it in writing, you run the risk of causing expensive litigation.

A tire company customer service person empathized with a customer who claimed he had lost his job because of a problem he noticed in his tire. The customer claimed that he was on his way to work when he saw a problem in his wife's tire. He didn't want her to drive on the tire, so he took the car to get the tire fixed. While he was at the tire store, a client called his company looking for him. No one could locate him, nor the information the client needed. Exasperated, the client cancelled his account with the company. When the gentleman arrived at work after having the tire fixed, he was fired.

The gentleman wrote a letter to the tire company explaining the situation. The customer service rep, on behalf of the tire company, responded, "We are sorry about the defect you found in your tire." That sentence—that apology and admission of guilt—was enough to cause the tire company to settle the claim out of court for \$20,000.

I told that story while working with an international hotel group. The director of national sales practically jumped out of his seat. "We are undergoing identical litigation," he said.

A new hotel salesperson told the meeting planner of a large association that she would hold a block of rooms for 3 weeks. Nothing

was put in writing. She held the block for 3 weeks and then, when she heard nothing, released the rooms. Two months later, the planner called to book the rooms and was told that they were no longer available. The planner didn't understand. He claimed that he had been in the hospital and that a message had been left for the hotel salesperson telling her that he would call when he got out of the hospital. She claimed she never received such a message. He was furious and became verbally abusive to her. In an effort to avoid making the situation worse, she decided to write a letter of apology to him. She emailed the following apology, "I am sorry I did not hold the block of rooms for you. I should have phoned you before releasing them."

Bingo! His lawyers now had the perfect case.

I was planning to advertise my speaking and training services with an exhibit booth at a trade show in Manhattan. I was very low on printed brochures and hired a printer in New York City who promised to deliver my printing to me at the show. The sales rep and I were in constant contact. I was assured that the delivery of my printing would take place at 10:00 a.m., 3 hours before the start of the show.

Ten o'clock, the appointed time, came and went. No printing. I called the company. No one could locate my order, or my rep. At 1:00 p.m., just as the doors to the show were opened, my sales rep came rushing in. He was profusely apologetic. He was so sorry, so very sorry, but there had been a press breakdown and he was unable to get me my printing.

What did his apology do for me? Did it solve my problem? I was at an expensive trade show with no collateral to give the attendees who stopped at my booth!

What was it I wanted? I wanted brochures! I needed to know when he would get my printing to me, or when I could expect black-and-white copies instead of four-color, or how he was plan-

ning to compensate me for having to put the brochures into the mail after the show.

He may have felt better because of his *mea culpa*, but a solution was what I needed in order to feel better.

Your readers want solutions to their problems, not apologies for yours.

Some workshop attendees have pointed out that they often hear their customers say, “All I really wanted was an apology.” I’ve heard that too. Notice, however, when the customer says that. Usually it is only after being totally frustrated, ignored, and disrespected, and just before jumping to the competitor, that the customer says, “All I wanted was . . .” What the customer wants is someone to listen, someone to care, and someone to show concern and respect. That is exactly what we do when we focus on a solution to the problem instead of making excuses for our poor behavior. We only make ourselves feel better with an apology.

I want you to love your clients! The more you show them love and the more you think about their welfare, the better they’ll feel about you and the better you’ll feel about you.

If you believe it helps your clients to hear you say those “magic” apology words, say them. Please consider, however, that California only recently enacted a law (yes, a law) allowing you to apologize at the scene of an accident. (I couldn’t make this up. “Californians can now say ‘I’m sorry’ at an accident scene without fear of being sandbagged by lawyers exploiting the words as a confession of liability” —*USA Today*, February 5, 2001.)

This book is about writing more powerfully. Powerful writers write in order to get good results. By the time a bad/sad situation gets

into writing, it is too late to apologize. In fact, the writer who writes, “I’m sorry about the inconvenience we caused you,” has opened his company to a giant lawsuit. Balance that against your desire to use those “magic” words. Stay focused on the solution to the dilemma you caused for your customer to help them move toward resolution.

Imagine that you are in the hotel or catering business and you are hosting a dinner for 1000 association members. The association executive has told you that the association president (the one who hires and fires the association executive) is allergic to shellfish. You make a note on your banquet event order.

The original agreement specified corn chowder. Somehow bad pixie dust, or something, got mixed in, and the chef prepares a delicious clam chowder. Because the association president has been assured that everyone knows about his allergy and his dietary restrictions, he doesn’t bother to ask the server about the food he is served. While he is talking to the person next to him, he gulps down a tablespoon of clam chowder. He takes a second spoonful and immediately feels his throat begin to swell. The paramedics get to him in time; he spends only one night in the hospital, and he is back at the meeting the next day.

The association executive is more than a little upset with you and demands that you write a letter of apology to the president. Her job is on the line, and she needs you to explain that this is your fault and that she did her due diligence.

Do you need to write a letter of apology or a letter of explanation? Will you begin with an apology? Close with it? Say it twice? Who will it help? What will you achieve?

Consider your purpose (of course!) by answering the four prewriting questions:

- Why am I writing? *To help the association executive keep her job.*

- What do I want to say? *We are happy to comp the entire dinner for everyone and to offer you additional incentives to return and be happy.*
- What do I want to accomplish? (What is my motivation for writing?) *To keep the association president happy so that the association executive will be happy (and employed) and will consider this hotel company—even if not this hotel—for her next meeting.*
- What is the next step? Will my reader know what the next step is, and who is to take that action? *The association president should understand that his staff did everything right, and that we want to make it up to him with a special VIP treatment package. He should call when he is ready to be pampered.*

Dear Mr. Philips:

You never should have had the experience you had at our hotel.

Lois Shirley did everything she could to ensure that all food—from soup to nuts—was cooked with your special dietary needs in mind. She had special notes on the BEO and spoke with the chef's staff at the pre-con. She had every reason to believe that her mandate would be followed.

I understand that there is nothing that will appropriately make up for the scare you experienced and the evening you spent in the hospital. I would like to do whatever I can, however, to ease the stress of that evening. Accordingly, the entire meal for all of your attendees that night has been comped. This offers the association a savings of \$18,798.

In addition, I would be delighted to host you and a guest for a weekend in the President's Suite. I will make all the arrangements for a delightful weekend for you, including two spa treatments of your choice and a complimentary prime tee time (for two) on our Coore and Crenshaw number one-rated golf course!

I promise you will be given VIP treatment from the moment you step off the airplane. We can never make up for the miscommunication, but we will try our hardest to provide you with the service and attention you deserve.

My direct line is 555-555-5555. Please call me when you are ready for some golf, pampering, and VIP treatment. Hope to see you soon.

Sincerely,

Max Glassman

If Max had apologized, where would he have inserted the apology? What and whom would it have helped? What would he have apologized for? The very best thing he could do was what he did: Focus on his solution, and on making sure that Lois Shirley didn't have to take any of the blame.

Everything we write has the potential to come back to haunt us. The more you stay focused on what matters to the other person, the more you care about helping them achieve results, the easier it will be for you to move forward to a positive solution and get the results you want.



PART THREE

SELLING YOUR IDEAS

Powerful writers persuade and motivate their readers. They place the interests of their readers before their own and write in a friendly, confident manner. They don't shout their message; they let their readers hear their concern—and the solutions they have to offer.

Selling your idea, whether through email or on paper, is a tough task. Your words are dead on the page or screen, and you must not only make them come alive for your readers, in the way in which they are most comfortable receiving the message, but also do this in a way that doesn't allow your readers to possibly misunderstand you.

This section gives you the tools you need to write professionally, persuasively, and powerfully. Whether you're trying to convince your sales manager to increase your commission structure, your customer to reorder before the end of the month, or your bookkeeper to cut you some slack in turning in your expenses, these strategies will improve your chances of getting what you want.

Use these ideas to enhance your potential and your sales success.

This page intentionally left blank.

Focus on What Matters to Them

Fill the other guy's basket to the brim. Making money then becomes an easy proposition.

Andrew Carnegie

Those of us who use love as a point of differentiation in business will separate ourselves from our competitors just as world-class distance runners separate themselves from the rest of the pack trailing behind.

Tim Sanders, *Love Is the Killer App:
How to Win Business and Influence Friends*

Have you heard the one about the three people and the corned beef sandwiches?

A woman runs into the deli and quickly orders her sandwich. She keeps looking at her watch impatiently as the counter person piles the sandwich high with corned beef. She needs to catch her

train to the Hamptons, where she's going for the weekend, and she wants her sandwich now.

The next guy isn't in such a rush. He has an hour for lunch, and he plans to enjoy a leisurely meal. In fact, today he is doing something that's totally out of character. Instead of his usual roast beef, he orders a corned beef sandwich. It's been years since he has had something other than roast beef, and he wants to savor it.

The third person isn't rushing at all. He usually doesn't eat lunch, or much else, for that matter. Today, while he was panhandling, someone gave him a ten-dollar bill. "Have a good meal," she said as she handed him the money. Clutching the bill, he walked up and down the street. Which restaurant would treat him okay and feed him well? Finally, he decides on the deli and sits down to relish a corned beef sandwich.

According to Ron Karr, in his "Titan Principle E Report," when 13-year-old Joshua Feldman told that story at his Bar Mitzvah, his point was to show how everyone looks at the Bar Mitzvah experience differently. As in life, we each have our own agenda for everything we do.

As writers, sales professionals, managers, and leaders, the better we understand those individual agendas, the more successful we'll be. Unknowingly, and even with good intentions, we write from our own perspective. Our product or idea or service is special and significant to us, and we're excited about it. We want to let the other person know about its extraordinary capabilities and whiz-bang features. It's only by focusing on its importance to the readers, however, that we can possibly get *them* excited.

Here is a perfect example of a terribly written sales letter. This salesperson works for a company that sells software to the security industry (the kind with a badge and a gun, not the financial kind). It's evident that the salesperson believes in his product. He just forgot about the reader and what he or she cares about. (Minor detail!)

Dear Michael,

Yesterday, I had a conversation with Patrick, your administrative assistant. We discovered that you are about to make a sizable investment in a software product, and for this we applaud you.

Most of our existing customers (see attached list) made their initial evaluation based upon Price alone. Once they invested 30 minutes with our company, they discovered the difference between Value and Cost!

Please allow us 30 minutes of your valuable time to see how industry-leading software will enable you to grow your business while keeping your administrative costs down.

If you discover that we are not the perfect solution and you wish to go with another vendor, so that your time was not wasted, please accept a \$50 donation to your favorite charity.

We look forward to hearing from you to schedule a good time for you to visit our corporate headquarters in Boca Raton, Florida.

*Sincerely,
Brady*

Sounds good, doesn't it? Aside from the grammatical errors, the letter is well written. (We'll talk about grammar rules later in this book. Because correcting grammar is the third step in the writing process, we'll concentrate on steps one and two—prewriting and writing your message.) So, what is the problem? The problem is that the letter tells—it data dumps—it doesn't sell!

Brady hasn't thought about the needs of his reader, although he has certainly made assumptions about him. Here is what Brady thinks and what he thinks Michael thinks:

- Michael cares whether Brady “applauds” him for making a sizable investment.
- Michael is no different from (or more special than) other existing customers.
- Michael’s time (including travel time plus the 30-minute demo) is worth only \$50.
- Michael will tell Brady what his favorite charity is (even though he hasn’t even spoken to Brady yet—remember, the only contact Brady has had with Michael is a discussion with Patrick).
- Michael is concerned about growing his business and keeping administrative costs down.
- Michael will be so motivated by this sales letter that he will pick up the phone and call a salesperson to schedule the 30-minute demo.

Brady has to be kidding! Does Brady have any idea why Michael is ordering this particular “sandwich” at this particular time? Why is Michael “about to make a sizable investment”? Has there been a security breach? Is this preventive? Is this a replacement of an older system? Is a new president’s concern with cost or quality behind this? What is driving this purchase? What result does Michael want and need? What is Michael’s motivation for this purchase? If Brady had any of this information, he could write a much stronger, much more effective sales letter.

The only way to get the result you want is to focus on what matters to the reader—not on what is important to you, the writer, or on what you *think* matters to the reader.

A few years ago I read a survey of 6000 people, all of whom had been overnight hospital patients within the prior 6 months. When these former patients were asked how they would choose a hospital the next time, they had two significant criteria:

- Service had to be good. (In the study, this meant that the nurses needed to be friendly and attentive. If the nurse smiled, he or she was perceived to be friendly.)
- Parking had to be convenient.

Parking? Who would think to sell that aspect of the hospital—unless, of course, you had been a patient and had had visitors complain or not come to visit because of poor or unsafe parking conditions?

The more focused your sales letter is on the reader's distinct needs, the more likely you are to make a sale.

A good sales letter allows the writer to differentiate him- or herself from the rest of the pack. Let your competition send messages that talk about how wonderful they and their product and service are. You'll differentiate yourself by sending messages that talk about how wonderful your customer is. You'll write about how successful your customer can be and how much easier your customer's life will be when he or she uses what you have to offer.

Keep this in mind when sending graphic files by email as well. Your logo may be absolutely beautiful (to you). If it takes your reader 3 minutes to load, however, trust me, it will not be nearly as beautiful to her. Before sending those lovely photographs of your product, ask yourself if it will be worth your reader's wait time to view them. Does your product really look different than your competi-

tor's? Is it something your reader can see clearly? Are you sending the graphic file because you like the way the pictures look or because they will help your reader learn something that will be helpful to her? Stay focused on your reader's needs, what matters to her. Value what is important to the other person to achieve sales success.

One Size Fits None

Women have known for years that the claim “one size fits all” is a lie.

Women and men understand that when we try to be all things to all people, we succeed in pleasing no one. We have no point of differentiation; there is nothing to set us apart.

Powerful sales letters sell because they focus on the reader's—that specific reader's—needs.

When Shania Twain released her two-CD album *Up!*, she released three different versions. Each CD has 19 vocals, but they appeal to different audiences. (Like every good salesperson, she focuses on what matters to her buyers.) The red CD, according to John Rockwell of the *New York Times*, “is sort of power pop, a green CD is sort of country and a blue CD is sort of ‘Bollywood.’ Depending on where one lives in the world, the buyer gets two versions.” Americans get to choose between the red and green issues, and the rest of the world selects between the red and blue.

No matter how pretty and thin Shania may be, she is also smart, smart, and (did I mention?) smart! To appeal to different tastes, she changes her appeal. Smart salespeople do the same.

The Sony company's Sony America team understands that the company can't market the same products to Americans that it mar-

kets to the Japanese. Americans love PlayStations, for instance, but they don't like playing Japanese video games. Why not? According to *FastCompany* magazine, "Americans love sports games; Japanese do not." Does Sony, which is so successful at marketing puzzle games in Japan, try to sell, push, or advertise those to the U.S. market? Of course not. Sony understands (as its sales figures show) that it must cater to the particular culture. To appeal to different tastes, it changes its appeal. Your sales letters must do the same.

Returning to the letter Brady wrote earlier in this chapter, consider how different his pitch would have been if he had asked Patrick questions that gave him information about Michael's business. Instead of being so ready to present his "schtick," he would have discovered the following things:

- Michael is a fairly new department manager.
- He has been in the security business for about 8 years and recently was promoted.
- Patrick has been there for 15 years.
- They've always scheduled everything manually.
- There have been no security breaches, everything has worked just fine, and everyone is comfortable with the way things are.
- Michael attended a conference where he met a vendor who was selling this new scheduling software.
- Michael is convinced that the department will run more efficiently and effectively with this software. Patrick isn't so sure. He knows it will mean a huge learning curve, and things are running perfectly well now.

- Michael doesn't want to do anything that is not politically correct.
- Michael has the authority to spend up to the budgeted amount (the other vendor's price) and will need approval to spend any additional funds.

If Brady had written to his reader's agenda and had understood what he hoped to accomplish with his sales letter, he could have written a strong sales letter.

You try it. With the information you now have about Michael, take a moment to answer the prewriting questions:

- Why am I writing?
- What do I want to say?
- What do I want to accomplish? (What is my motivation for writing?)
- What is the next step? Will my reader know what the next step is, and who is to take that action?

Here are my answers to the prewriting purpose questions:

- Why am I writing? *To help Michael feel comfortable investing in a quality software system.*
- What do I want to say? *Our software solution is easy to use and easy to learn; it will bring enhanced organization and increased security to your department and company and can still be within budget.*
- What do I want to accomplish? (What is my motivation for writing?) *To start building a relationship. To get Michael interested enough that he'll accept my phone call.*
- What is the next step? Will my reader know what the next step is, and who is to take that action? *Michael will*

accept my call to him on September 9, before he buys the other system. (Notice how the purpose of this letter is not to sell Michael on the system. It is only to pique his interest enough so he'll accept my phone call.)

Dear Michael,

Patrick and I had a great conversation yesterday about the new software system you are considering purchasing. The system has some very interesting features.

Before you authorize that check, however, would you have a few minutes to talk on the phone about how you can keep your investment within budget and make life easier for yourself, Patrick, and the entire company?

Selecting a software solution is always a bit frightening because everyone has to learn to do things differently. Our solution, unlike many other software programs, is easy to use, and we guarantee it will be up and running within 2 hours on the very first day! By day 3, most of our customers are so comfortable with the new software that they can't believe they did it any other way!

If you're looking for a solution that will enhance organization, increase security, and be quick to learn and easy to use, we may have the answer for you.

Patrick mentioned that you were planning to move forward with your decision within a few days. I'll plan to call you tomorrow, Wednesday, September 9, to talk about how you can provide the best security at the best price.

Sincerely,

Brady

The more you know about your reader's motivation, the better you'll write. The more attention you pay to what's in it for the reader, rather than what is terrific about your own product and what you would like to see happen, the more successful you'll be. The more you differentiate yourself by avoiding the temptation to try to sell all people on the same thing and by letting them know that you care about their success, the more likely you'll be to get the result you want. Determine whether it's corned beef or roast beef that's important to your reader. Understand the motivation for ordering the corned beef, and you'll be more persuasive than you can possibly imagine!

Grab Their Attention to Sell Your Idea

There is no such thing as “soft sell” and “hard sell.” There is only “smart sell” and “stupid sell”!

Charles Brower

You have 18 emails waiting in your inbox. How do you decide which ones you'll open?

If you're like the thousands of people who have attended my Power Writing training programs, you know exactly how you make your decisions. You decide by looking at the:

- Sender's name and
- Subject line.

If you don't know who sent the message and you don't care about the subject, it's easy and convenient to simply click Delete. It's a great feeling to have one less email to handle.

Let's say that, this one time, you're tricked by the sender's email name. Maybe the sender's email address looks like it could be someone you know (Gee, isn't that the name of my best friend from the fourth grade?), or the subject line appears to be something important or interesting.

As you click open the message, brightly colored graphics begin to fill the screen. The subject line that seemed so innocuous turns into a description of a drug that (knock wood) you don't need yet, or into a site that somehow got through your firewall and you are embarrassed to even "lust in your heart" about! You quickly realize that you've been bamboozled, and in a second—perhaps a nanosecond—you hit the Delete key.

In the olden days, when all mail was sent through the postal service (and the letters that needed to be there absolutely, positively overnight were typed and delivered to the FedEx drop-off), direct mailers had exact statistics on the amount of attention and length of time we'd give to each letter before discarding it.

Leo Bott, Jr., a direct mail marketer, found that *5 seconds* was the statistical average. We allowed ourselves a paltry 5 seconds, in a much less rushed world, to determine whether the message, or the person who wrote it, was important enough to us that we would deign to read it.

In today's world, with every communication tool available to us (often all wanting our attention at the same time), we have no choice. If we are to have any hope of persuading, influencing, and selling in writing, we must grab the reader's attention immediately.

Grab Your Reader's Eye

Routine messages, those messages that present standard information, follow Plan A. The most powerful message Plan A messages begin with the main idea. When necessary, the main idea is followed up with detail and background.

Messages written to readers who are likely to be stressed out, uncomfortable, or angry are most powerful when they begin with a buffer. As we discussed in earlier chapters, this Plan B format neutralizes the message and motivates the reader to continue reading.

Sales letters, to be effective, most be formatted differently. Powerful sales messages follow a Plan C format. Plan C has four distinct characteristics, though each characteristic may need only a few words to deliver effectively. Those four characteristics are:

- Grab attention.
- Build interest.
- Educate about your offer.
- Ask for action.

Plan C begins by getting attention—grabbing the reader's eye. Unless the writer can break through the clutter and grasp the reader's attention, nothing can happen.

Catch your reader's eye by telling him what's in it for him. Tell her exactly what she'll gain, save, profit, achieve, or accomplish. Because we're motivated by either gaining and enjoying pleasure or avoiding or eliminating pain, you can, if you prefer, tell your reader exactly what he'll avoid, reduce, or eliminate. (According to Anthony Robbins, the tall, good-looking, lots of teeth, infomercial/fire walking/*Shallow Hal* motivational guru, we strive much

harder to avoid something bad than we will work to enjoy the possibility of gaining something good.)

The headline of your sales letter or the subject line of your email should get your reader so interested that she'll be seduced into reading the rest of your message. The opening doesn't need to close the sale. All it needs to do is interest the reader enough with a promise of something she'll avoid or enjoy that she'll continue to read.

Direct marketing researchers observed people as they read two-page sales letters. (The readers had been instructed to bring their unopened office mail [2 days worth of mail] with them to the research site. Each had been sent a two-page test letter in their mail. It looked like a regular letter. The readers [the test subjects] didn't know what the researchers were looking for as they read their mail.) Almost every reader read the first sentence (five times as many people read a short, punchy headline as read a complete sentence), then skipped the body of the document and turned the letter over to check out the signature and the PS! If the postscript was motivational enough, the reader would then flip the letter back over and read it from the beginning.

The PS, or postscript, is a powerful tool to grab your reader's eye in a sales letter. It should not be new information but should highlight and remind your reader of your strongest benefit. The PS essentially reiterates your headline using different words. It gives you the chance to rephrase the headline benefit in case your reader didn't get it the first time. Keep the PS short and sweet and focused on the reader. (Only use a PS in a sales letter and use it as an attention-getting device. When a PS is added in a nonsales-letter format, it is generally introducing a new idea. Why? Did the writer not organize his thoughts properly? Is this something he just thought of? Why wasn't this included in the text?)

Capture your reader's attention by painting a snapshot of your benefit in as few words as possible. Remember, your goal is to compel the reader to continue reading, rather than simply fast-forward scroll to the end of the document—or, worse, immediately click that Delete key.

Picture how and when your readers read your email. Your unsolicited e-message is simply an interruption in their day (until you get them interested and they see how what you have to offer will help them be more successful). Your reader may have 12 or 20 or 200 emails in his inbox. If your goal is to reach him at home, the TV may be on in the background, and his family may be vying for his attention. If your intention is to reach her at work, she is probably juggling 13 business issues at one time, has a meeting in 5 minutes, and has a personal phone call that she needs to make. They are both clicking, responding, and deleting their messages as quickly as they can. Ta-da, they get to your email. Why would either of them take their valuable time to read what you have written?

Think about it. We *choose* to read instead of doing something else that's more interesting. We won't hurt the writer's feelings if we click Delete or wad up the letter into a tight little ball and take shooting practice with it. The writer can't see us, and doesn't know if we paid attention for 1 second or 20.

Even when we're on the phone, we tend to be polite. Most of us especially don't want to offend someone who is face to face, looking us in the eye, so we listen for a while to be polite.

When we write, on the other hand, we're at the other person's mercy. There is no need for that person to be polite. He or she is preoccupied and busy with important stuff. What will get that person to stop and read this particular message we have sent?

Walk some miles in your customer's shoes. What matters to her? If you're a hotel salesperson writing to a corporate meeting profes-

sional who is planning a new product sales rally, stop thinking like a hotel salesperson! It's easy to talk about your beautiful hotel, its location by the water or near the city center or close to the airport, and, of course, the state-of-the-art media technology that was installed during the \$60 million renovation the hotel just underwent. And all of that really may be interesting to the reader—eventually. If you want to compel someone to read, however, start with a quick, clear, attention-getting statement that talks about how she will benefit.

Think like your customer. What does the meeting professional want from the sales rally? Why is the company directing her to spend many, many corporate dollars to bring the sales team together? It would be much cheaper to send an email detailing the product's features. Why is the meeting being held? It's being held because the company believes that if it brings everyone together and gets them all excited about the awesome potential of this new product, they'll sell more, and they'll sell better. Isn't that what matters to your buyer? What can you tell her that will assure her that the team will sell more and sell better because the meeting was held at your hotel?

How about beginning the email with a subject line, or writing a letter headline, such as,

They'll leave pumped and ready to \$ell more!

That is far more compelling than: *We are so excited about the possibility of hosting your new product sales rally. With our state-of-the-art technology and our recent \$60 million renovation, we will rally together to make this an event they'll remember.* (I could stick my finger down my throat!)

If you're selling landscaping services to upscale homeowners, begin with the benefit they'll receive from using your service. Depending on the specific needs of your prospects, you might start with any of these headlines:

"Relax while your neighbors weed!! Yours will be done for you!"

"Pets and kids get special treatment at Landscapes R Us!"

"Solitude and serenity . . . let us transform your garden into the sanctuary you've always imagined."

"Don't let your lawn embarrass you another year!"

"Your wife is right! The yard needs help, and you have no time!"

One size can't possibly fit all! If a prospect wants solitude and serenity, do you think he'll read the sales letter that opens with "Pets and kids"? The salesperson who wants to use the written word as a way to build relationships and sell more powerfully grasps the readers' attention. This can be accomplished only when the writer understands what the reader is buying.

Sell the opportunity—not the product. Compel your reader to read more.

Be Concise

Your attention-getting headline or subject line needs to be quick, punchy, and concise. As we discussed earlier in this chapter, the reader allows very little time to pass before determining if he will continue to read.

Sidney Smith said, “In composing, as a general rule, run a pen through every other word you have written; you have no idea what vigor it will give your style.”

Use words your reader will both relate to and understand. Stephen King, in his book, *A Memoir of the Craft: On Writing*, recommends using easy, conversational language regardless of the type of writing you’re doing. “One of the really bad things you can do to your writing is to dress up the vocabulary, looking for long words because you’re a little bit ashamed of your short ones. This is like dressing up a household pet in evening clothes.” Keep your words short and to the point to impress your reader with your ideas.

Increase your chances that your reader—your prospect—will open and read your message by getting her attention with an eight-to sixteen-word benefit-laden headline. Keep the opener crisp and clearly focused to break through her preoccupation and entice her to attend to your message.

Build Interest to Keep Them with You

Your purpose is to make your audience see what you saw, hear what you heard, feel what you felt. . . . Relevant detail, couched in concrete, colorful language, is the best way to recreate the incident as it happened and to picturize it for the audience.

Mark Twain

You've written an attention-getting opener to your sales letter. Your reader, expecting to see one more writer-centered verbal essay, is taken aback by your focus on her. "Yes," that meeting professional with the sales rally says aloud, "that is precisely what I want! I want my attendees to 'leave pumped and ready to \$ell more!' Which hotel company is writing this?"

You have hooked her because you spoke to her. You focused on her success and what she wants, rather than on your success and what you want.

Now what? You have her attention—build on it. Help her to see those attendees excited, jumping out of their seats, and determined to go back to the field and sell, sell, sell! Let her see her want (enthusiastic salespeople excited about selling the new product) fulfilled. Help her to picture the salespeople getting on their airplanes, still buzzing over the potential and possibility of the new product, chomping at the bit to get back to tell their customers about it. (Do you see how different this is from letting her see how many square feet of space your ballroom has or how pretty your new fitness center is?)

What will help her to see, hear, and feel the group's excitement? How can you reinforce the idea "they'll leave pumped and ready to \$ell more"? Quickly move to a descriptive word picture that helps her see the results she wants.

They'll leave pumped and ready to \$ell more!

Picture your sales team—2000 strong—learning about the possibilities of your new product. Watch the excitement grow as the music pulsates from the 32 music stations in the ballroom. Feel their enthusiasm as the 150-foot screen surrounds them with your video production, showcasing your product to perfection. Hear them cheer when your executive team tells them the product is ready to go, today, now . . . and that profits are waiting to be made.

Get them excited with your words! Titillate their senses with sensory, emotion-laden words. Notice the descriptions in this paragraph: "Watch the excitement grow . . . feel their enthusiasm . . . hear them cheer." The more sensual the words, the more your reader responds.

Each reader responds to different stimuli. The three main types of stimuli, or styles in which people communicate and understand information, are visual, auditory, and kinesthetic. Visual learners like to read; they see the meaning of the words on the page. You enhance their reading pleasure by using words that are full of imagery, helping them to easily visualize word pictures in their mind's eye.

Auditory learners prefer to hear what you have to say. They prefer the phone to email, and so, to keep them listening to your email message, you need to use “hearing” words. (Notice the use of the word *listening* in that sentence.) Words that they can hear (this idea rings with truth, hear the crowd) keep them reading (often aloud).

Kinesthetic learners rapidly connect with an idea or product that they can touch, sense, or feel. Words that are palpable help them to grasp, hold on to, and handle the message.

Read these opening paragraphs from a fabulous sales letter written by Candace Taylor and Deborah Weiss for the Westin LaPaloma Hotel and Resort in Tucson. I've highlighted some of the visual (V), auditory (A), and kinesthetic (K) words for you.

Notice also how Candace and Deborah got their reader's attention. This sales letter did not need a headline to grab the reader's attention. It was a response to the customer's request. It didn't have to break the reader's preoccupation because the reader had already expressed interest in learning about what they had to offer. This sales letter was solicited and correctly follows a modified Plan C format. (The use of Parker Daniel's name at the beginning reminds the reader of the connection—just in case he had forgotten that he had asked for this information. It helps the reader recall that he has an established relationship with the company—and, by extension, with this sales rep.)

Dear Mr. William:

Parker Daniel at the Metropolitan Tucson Convention and Visitors Bureau tells us you're considering Tucson as a site for your _____ meeting. That's great news! Now just imagine (K) this:

- From the moment your guests arrive at The Westin LaPaloma Resort, they'll know you've chosen someplace very special for them. Three-story-high windows (V) and majestic mountain views (V) will wow (K) them as they walk (K) into the comfortably elegant lobby. They will appreciate the spacious lobby lounge and welcoming conversational areas perfect for networking and visiting, an important aspect of any gathering.*
- Nothing beats a good night's sleep, and you can rest assured your participants will be very comfortable in our stylish guestrooms with the distinctive Westin Heavenly Beds and Heavenly Bath products. Guests can experience (K) the beauty of a Tucson sunrise or sunset from their private balcony or patio. (V)*
- You'll be holding (K) your program in meeting space that has been designed by planners just like you, with an eye for detail (V) and an emphasis on natural light, flexibility, and lots of breakout options. Your attendees will be able to enjoy the beautiful views and Tucson's 320 days of annual sunshine from the lovely terraces, patios, and outdoor venues.*
- Picture (V) the fun and camaraderie your attendees will have playing a golf course designed by Jack Nicklaus himself, or the refreshed and rejuvenated spirits (K) they'll have*

after a day at the Elizabeth Arden Red Door Spa. Or, how about the total relaxation they'll have enjoying the best pool area in Tucson (with a swim up bar, adult pool, and water-slide), or their delight in finding a perfect Tucson treasure in one of our boutiques. To throw some adventure (K) into your program, just imagine (V) them heading off for desert jeep rides, mountain biking, hiking, or even a real life cattle drive!

- *You'll be hearing (A) rave reviews from attendees who leave with rich memories of sunny skies, soaring saguaro cacti, and a unique cultural heritage. (V) This is the Arizona they imagined. (K)*

How could you not continue to read? (I'll bet you even want to continue reading their letter now. You'll get to read more in the next chapters.) The reader—any reader—can hear, see, and smell the Arizona desert and the beautiful hotel through the writers' words. Deborah and Candace reached out to their reader by using the name of the "friend" they have in common with the writer. Then they compelled Mr. William to continue reading by building on the benefits they have to offer. Everything is about Mr. William and the success of his meeting.

Once you have your readers paying attention to you, keep their attention by using varying word choices and by going into detail (but not too much detail) about the benefits they'll receive. Do a great job of laying out the benefits and even if you don't have every feature they were hoping for, you'll influence them to continue reading and possibly—just possibly—get exactly the result you want!

This page intentionally left blank.

Deliver Your Features

Power is the ability to get things done.

Rosabeth Moss Kanter

Powerful writers get things done. Their words move their buyers to act. Their emails, letters and proposals, whether directed toward internal customers or toward external clients, get them the result they want.

The previous chapters in this book have taught you to start your sales messages with truthful and compelling statements that focus on the benefits your prospect will receive. By using word pictures, you help your readers to see, hear, and practically touch those benefits. This next step keeps the momentum going for you. It's the education step, and likely the step you've been waiting for! Like a woman in labor, now is the time you finally get to push . . . your products! This is your opportunity to validate the benefits you offered with specific facts, features, and details.

“Costco-ize” your writing. You’ve been to a Costco store, right? The next time you’re there (with the intention of buying only two items and winding up with a cart loaded with products), pick up one of the company’s written advertising pieces. According to Jeff Blackman’s *Results Reports*, Costco’s 2003 mailer states:

“Costco sells more than 48,000 rotisserie chickens a day.”

“Last year, Costco sold more than 50,000 carats of diamonds.”

“Costco’s 1 Hour Photo Labs process more than 22 million rolls of film each year.”

“Costco’s famous hot dog and soda combo meal is the same low price it was 17 years ago—\$1.50! Last year, we sold more than 38 million hot dogs!”

“Join the more than 39 million Costco members who save on high quality and brand-name products!”

That’s irrefutable evidence that it is safe to shop at Costco! Attorneys call this “substantive proof” or “demonstrative evidence.” Robert Cialdini, in his seminal book *Influence*, calls it “social proof.” Whatever you call it, use it! When other people do it, buy it, like it, and want it, we do it, buy it, like it, and want it, too. Let your readers know how others feel about your product or service. Let them hear the words others use to describe your awesome service, your impeccable attention to detail, and your concern for their welfare.

The best way to talk about your features is for you not to talk at all. Let your happy customers and delighted clients do it for you. Use their words to convince your prospects that you have what it takes to produce the tangible and intangible benefits you’ve promised.

Quotations from pleased buyers demonstrate evidence of acceptability and offer your readers ironclad social proof that you (your service, your product) will perform. If I were selling any of the following items, could I sell my product with as much enthusiasm as the customer has, and be as believable? My readers could certainly think I had an ulterior motive (suckering them in!) if I said these things about my own product. When someone else says it, however, it must be true! (After all, what would be in it for the other person to say this if it weren't the truth?)

A.J.'s spinach dip is better than home made! I buy it for every party knowing my guests will love it and it will start the evening perfectly. My grandmother always said if you give them a great appetizer and a great dessert, they've had a great meal! Thank you, A.J.'s, for making my entertaining so easy!

—Abby May, Event Planner, Scottsdale, Arizona

The George Forman grill is the best new kitchen tool since the invention of the microwave! Every time I cook with it, the food turns out perfectly, and I love that it cooks with no fat or unnecessary calories. I've lost 5 pounds, and I'm eating more healthily than ever before!

—Alma Flores; Teacher, Seattle, Washington

MegaColor delivers exceptional quality, speedy turnaround, and awesome customer service. We use them for all our printing needs—promos, catalogs, posters, and more—and have never been disappointed. My team always looks good because of MegaColor's attention to detail.

—Bill Earnest, Austin, Texas

Word-of-mouth referral—the social proof inherent in the third-party testimonial—drives more revenue and greater profitability than any other method of selling. It's the simplest and easiest way to educate the readers about features. I can say that I'm the best speaker in the galaxy. (What else am I going to say—that I'm the worst?) Nothing I could say to my readers, however, could be more effective than quoting what Jane McCord of UBS/PaineWebber said:

We could not have asked for more. Hopefully, you feel as good as I do about having 100% of the class giving an overwhelming positive response about an afternoon well spent with you. . . . I broke my ankle getting on the Ferry coming back from NY from your class. Oh, but your class was worth it! How's that for a testimonial?

It's critical to provide enough information about the person you're quoting to allow your reader to authenticate the statement. A quote followed only by initials offers neither social proof nor peace of mind. The following quotation may be valid, but without specific identifying information, it can't be trusted:

This is the best headset on the market. It blocked out the irritations of airplane travel, and I was relaxed and stress free when I got off the plane. A first for me!

—WEC, Thomasville, North Carolina

Is WEC the president of the company or the president's daddy?

Cialdini's principle of social proof is easy to use. Pull out all those complimentary letters you've filed. Select the specific statements that highlight the qualities you want your reader to remember. Let your satisfied buyers educate those prospects about your product and its features. You'll get more accomplished with social proof than any truthful but seemingly biased description or explanation you can provide. Deliver your features in a manner that builds credibility and sales.

Let your buyers know that they have nothing to fear. Use social proof to make buying easy.

This page intentionally left blank.

Educate Enough, but Not Too Much

The secret of being a bore is to tell everything.

Voltaire

This is your chance to talk about what you have to offer. It isn't your opportunity for a data dump! Refrain from telling your reader more than she or he wants to know. Voltaire was right: If you tell your readers everything, not only will you bore them, but you're likely to lose the sale, too.

Whether you're presenting verbally or in writing, stop yourself from talking about all the wonderful things you can do or have to offer. Remember: They care about only what they care about!

If you're a financial planner writing to baby boomers, for example, don't bother writing about the four awesome new financial plans designed to help them finance their kids' education. It's too

late for them, bub! Their kids are in college or beyond it by now. (If, on the other hand, you're writing to a Gen X'er, this may be perfect.) Even though you may have the best four plans in the entire universe for financing their kids' education, stop yourself from telling people things they don't care about. Their need is for a plan to alleviate debt, not one that prepares them to plan for the expense.

Some people are afraid that if they don't mention every great product or service they offer, they may miss an opportunity. Yes, it's possible that one or two or twenty of the baby boomers may have kids who are not yet through with their college education. I have one friend in his late fifties with kids in grade school, and another friend in her forties who just had her first baby. If you're sending an unsolicited sales letter, however, you are already playing the odds: the odds that they'll open it, the odds that they'll be captured by your first statement, the odds that they'll read it through to discover how valuable you can be to them. Don't stack the deck against yourself by writing to the exception!

Unsolicited sales writing is a huge gamble even when you pay keen attention to the quality of the list. You are wasting postage, printing costs, paper, and your time if you don't get the result you want. Even if you email, you are wasting your time and possibly your reputation if too many readers consider your message to be spam. Before sending unsolicited mail (of any kind), consider what you expect to achieve. If a 1 to 3 percent return (generally accepted as the response rate for direct mail) satisfies your need, go for it (and use these strategies).

A special note if you're soliciting through email: Do not spam your prospect. Not only will you annoy them, but many states prohibit spam. The point of your email should be to invite and entice your reader to opt in to your information through your web site or by replying to your solicitation. Consider how interesting a blind

date must be to overcome resistance. Your effective email solicitation—when they have no previous knowledge or desire for your service—must do the same.

If you do choose to send 500 letters or 5000 emails to that extremely well qualified mailing list (and with a dire warning against spamming!), offer the benefit that is most likely to get your readers' attention, and educate them about the features of your product or service that are most commonly enjoyed and universally desired.

You've read this before. The more you know about what matters to your prospect—the colleague in the next department whom you're trying to win over to your point of view, the donor you're appealing to, the IT person developing the new database—the more likely you are to get the result you want, even when the letter or email is essentially a cold call. The more you understand about what features of your product or service they find important, the more effective your message will be.

Nothing replaces knowing your readers' needs.

The salesperson who wrote the following letter should have had all the information he needed to write a terrific letter. He should have known what was important to the reader's decision. Instead of considering the reader and his predicament, however, the writer did a perfect data dump! He used a standard form letter (which didn't fit the situation) and filled in the blanks. (Form letters are efficient tools only when they are created for a specific purpose and used solely for that purpose. Too many rushed sales professionals personalize poorly written or inappropriate templates. Take the time to develop excellent templates and use them with confidence.)

December 14, 2003

Dear Dr. Sidney,

Thank you for your interest in the We-Delight-Them Hotel and Conference Center. We would certainly enjoy the opportunity of hosting the Lowden Lane Dental Program scheduled for December 19, 2003.

Our location on the waterfront and adjacent to the Islands is the finest in the city. We offer 1205 rooms (including 67 suites), three restaurants, a spectacular double Olympic-size swimming pool and lagoon, a tennis center, and our own 16-acre, 295-slip marina. We have over 80,000 square feet of exquisite banquet and meeting facilities, a sun deck, a fully equipped business center, an elegant shopping arcade, and a health club with state-of-the-art fitness equipment and aerobics classes.

We currently have space available December 19, 2003.

To assist you in your planning, our current group rates are \$189.00 single and \$199.00 double occupancy.

Dr. Sidney, I look forward to the possibility of working with you on the Lowden Lane Dental meeting. In the interim, please feel free to contact me directly with any questions you may have.

Sincerely,

Charles Carroll

Give me a break! This meeting is only 5 days away. How many hotel rooms do you think the reader cares about? The correct answer, of course, is: only the ones he needs! How many restaurants or swimming pools, how much tennis space or square feet of banquet facilities do you think matter to him? Only what he'll need for his attendees, who happen to be arriving 5 days from the date of

the letter! The funniest part, to me, is when Charles educates Dr. Sidney about the 295-slip marina. Did the good doc indicate that he was planning to come with the entire flotilla?

If salesperson Charles had taken the time to answer the four prewriting questions, he would have better understood his purpose for writing. He would have eliminated the information that absolutely would be of great value to an association planner who was making decisions about where to hold a meeting 5 years from now, but was pure junk to the very-late-planning doctor!

- Why am I writing? *To tell Dr. Sidney we have his preferred dates and we can handle his meeting needs.*
- What do I want to say? *Great news! We can accommodate you at a good rate, can comp the board meeting, can arrange the golf.*
- What do I want to accomplish? (What is my motivation for writing?) *I want him to sign the agreement I'm attaching to confirm his meeting at my hotel.*
- What is the next step? Will my reader know what the next step is, and who is to take that action? *I want him to fax back the signed agreement, and then I can get to work on all the details . . . find out if I can upsell him on dinner.*

Dear Dr. Sidney,

Great news! The rooms you require for the December 19, 2003, Lowden Lane Dental Program are available. The discounted group rates for these beautiful rooms are \$189.00 single and \$199.00 double.

We can accommodate your board meeting in our luxuriously appointed boardroom on a complimentary basis. Golf can

be arranged, as you requested, on the North course at Talking Stick Golf Club.

I'm attaching the agreement outlining what we can provide to you to make your meeting a success. If you would print it out, sign it, and fax it back to me (555-555-5555) by the end of the day today, I can have all the details confirmed for you by 8:00 a.m. tomorrow.

Dr. Sidney, please let me know if you would like me to arrange for lunch or dinner for your group. We can provide everything from a light buffet working lunch to a delicious and memorable gourmet dinner. The coffee break, featuring Starbucks coffee, will be available all morning.

See you Friday!

*Sincerely,
Charles Carroll*

If Charles wants to provide a bigger picture of the services his hotel provides (in case the Lowden Lane Dental Program decides to extend its stay or come back next year), he can send a faxable one-page brochure or attach a PowerPoint hotel tour. By writing only about the features Dr. Sidney needs, Charles shows respect for the doctor's time and concern for the doctor's needs. And that, after all, is what matters to the doctor!

Keep Your Reader's Eyes Moving

According to speed reading research conducted a few years ago, 67 percent of adult Americans read in what the researchers called a "Z" pattern. Our eyes take in the words in a pattern resembling the letter Z. We are in such a hurry to finish reading the message that we

don't even bother to read to the end of a line—forget reading to the end of a sentence!

With email, we often scroll as we read (much like coming to a “rolling stop” at a stop sign). We keep the “page” moving as we attempt to figure out the point of this message and move on to the next one.

One reason we don't pay attention while we read is that we don't need all the information that is coming our way, and we are content with simply taking in a snapshot preview. Another reason for our lack of attention to what others write (and, conversely, their lack of attention to what we write to them) is that we (and they) are just swamped with stuff to do. We're way past information overload; we're overwhelmed and exhausted and feel that we can accomplish everything (or at least more) only if we do (at least) two things at once.

Psychologist David Baldwin calls this “The Doing Two-or-Three Things at a Time Syndrome.” He says that once we're comfortable multitasking, we actually feel uncomfortable when we're doing only one thing at a time. (I could be the poster child for this syndrome!) Many of us are so accustomed to juggling two things at once that we don't even realize we're doing it. We read our email while we talk on the phone (and throw the ball to the dog). We read the proposal (which someone else labored over) while we eat lunch and listen to the news on the radio. Because we know that others are just as overwhelmed and we can't control what other people do (only what we do), we need to write in a manner that encourages them to focus their attention on our message.

Make it as easy as possible for your readers to grasp your points by drawing their eye down the page or screen. List your data, rather than present it in pure narrative form, to enable your reader to scroll down the message and still get your point.

When you choose to write in narrative form, break up the monotonous type pattern with headings and subheadings. Divide ideas with headings and subheadings to permit the reader to skim your message using that comfortable and efficient “Z” pattern. Headings and subheadings will also help your reader to see and stop to actually read any heading that interests him. He can move to your point without wasting his valuable time.

Use graphic tools like underlining, bolding, colors, and italics to make your point. If you want certain terms to jump from the page, make them do that. Avoid going crazy using these tools, however. If everything is highlighted to stand out, nothing stands out.

Do you remember the sales rally example from Chapters 12 and 13? (You were a hotel salesperson writing to a corporate meeting professional who was planning a new product sales rally.) This draft of the sales letter uses sound sales and writing psychology to make its point.

Dear Martha Sue,

Your sales team—pumped and ready to \$ell more!

Picture your sales team—2000 strong—learning about the potential and possibilities of your incredible new product. Watch the excitement grow as the music pulsates from the 32 music stations in the ballroom. Feel their enthusiasm as the 150-foot screen surrounds them with your video production, showcasing your product to perfection. Hear them cheer when your executive team tells them the product is ready to go, today, now . . . and that profits are waiting to be made.

*Selecting **the perfect site for your sales rally** is critical to the success of your new product rollout. Attendees comfortable in their surroundings, relaxed, pampered, and mingling together help synergy grow, excitement mount, and profits rise! Casa Pink offers you that perfect site!*

Here is what Karolyn Kibby, Meetings and Concierge Source, Scottsdale, Arizona, said about her meeting held here: “This was the best sales rally ever! Your hotel made it easy for the team to both have fun and focus on why they were there. The pins your people wore were perfect motivators and appreciated by all! When you told me you paid attention to details, I never expected you to mean even the smallest ones!”

Diane Carson, meeting planner at Safe Food Stores, said, “Incredible! From the moment our salespeople walked in, your staff made sure they felt special. I have to admit I was a bit concerned about moving 2000 people from session to session within those short breaks, but you made it happen for us—flawlessly.”

Casa Pink makes your meeting a success. Your sales team will be ready to “hit the streets” after the comfort and pampering they’ll receive here. For instance:

- All rooms were remodeled this year and offer extra firm beds with fluffy pillows and comforters to ensure a good night’s rest.
- All rooms have easy-to-reach data ports (no ducking under the bed to find the telephone outlet!) and two phone lines to make it simple to connect to the Internet and their customers at the same time.
- All meeting rooms are located on one level, making it easy and convenient to keep the energy moving from the excitement of the general session to the smaller learning sessions.
- Wait until they see the new spa!! The spa has 18 treatment rooms, so we can relax 18 of your attendees at a time! (Of course, many more can be de-stressing in our steam room, warm water waterfall, and private relaxation rooms.)

The writer could have regaled Martha Sue for 10 more pages. Length, by the way, is not necessarily a bad thing. (One of the best sales letters I ever read was 38 pages long! Every word focused on what was important to the reader at that moment. It wasn't short, but it was concise. Hard to believe, but every word the writer chose focused on the reader and how he or she would benefit.)

Refuse to data dump! List the features and important ideas that matter to your reader. Validate your benefits clearly, crisply, and cleverly by appealing to varying communication styles and by surprising your reader with vivid language and strong social proof. When your reader understands that you are focused on what matters to her, you move her toward the next and final step in this sales letter process.

Ask for What You Want

The minute you settle for less than you deserve, you get even less than you settled for.

Maureen Dowd

If I had one dollar for every email, “sales” letter, or proposal I’ve received that did not close with a clear, powerful action step, I’d be on my yacht with a martini (stirred, not shaken) in hand, waiting for my helicopter to transport me to my private Gulfstream V to jet me to my villa mountain retreat, where a team of butlers would have my bath drawn and dinner waiting.

A closing statement with impact will motivate your reader to act. A poorly written (or nonexistent) close is like an Olympic gymnast who falls on dismount. The athlete loses points, and you lose the sale.

Do these closing statements exude power and professionalism?

“If I can be of further assistance, please do not hesitate to call.”

“I’ll phone you within the next two weeks to talk about how we can work together. In the interim, please feel free to call me with any questions you may have.”

“Thanks again for your interest.”

“Please review.”

Those statements give me gas! They don’t tell the reader anything. (And if you think the reference in the second statement to calling within the next two weeks is good, think again. Keep reading!)

Are you writing to sell or to tell? Unless you’re writing only, purely, and single-mindedly to provide information (Plan A), a precise, easy-to-follow action step is mandatory. It’s as close to a writing commandment as you can get: Honor thy action step! When you’re writing to move someone closer to an action, you have to tell him or her what that action is!

To ensure that your sales letter is powerful, be relentless about including a clear, easy-to-understand action step.

Circumstances exist in which it’s appropriate for the reader to be required to take the next step. If your reader is traveling internationally, for instance, it’s easier for both of you to ask her to follow up with you, at her convenience. There are other times when the writer deliberately wants to put the burden of responsibility on the reader. Most often, however, not only are you, the sales professional, obliged to take the next step, but you want, desire, and crave the opportunity to control that next step. No matter who has to do it, though, it must be clear that someone has to do something.

The salesperson who wrote the following email took the time to respond to his lead. So what? Now what? What is the reader sup-

posed to do? What is the next step? Is the reader expected to take some action? What can the writer expect to happen now? What result is Gibson expecting?

Good Afternoon Mr. Champion:

We are very excited and enthusiastic to have the opportunity to be considered as your vendor of choice! For your review, I have attached our POOPS Specifications Form. If you have any questions, please do not hesitate to phone me direct.

Thank you for your time and consideration. We look forward to a positive response.

Gibson Gator

How will this sale move forward? Is the statement, “If you have any questions, please do not hesitate to phone me direct,” supposed to be a powerful action request? Or is the last sentence, “We look forward to a positive response,” supposed to motivate me to act? What is “a positive response” to this email, anyway? Should Champion email back, “okay”? The action statement is MIA!

Suppose Champion had initiated this sales letter when he emailed Gator to see if his company qualified as a prospective vendor on the BARK project. What does Gator want to accomplish with his response? Does he simply want to say, “Yeah, baby, that’s us, we’re qualified”? Or, does he want to use the opportunity he has been handed to sell his company as the vendor of choice to Champion?

- Why am I writing? *To let him know that Dogco is a qualified vendor and that we can design the most profitable and reliable distribution system for him.*
- What do I want to say? *Dogco has an extensive track record in the pet industry.*

- What do I want to accomplish? (What is my motivation for writing?) *To start a relationship; get details about BARK either by email or on phone.*
- What is the next step? Will my reader know what the next step is and who is to take that action? *I want him to email back with more information or accept my phone call to discuss the project.*

Here is a rewrite of that email:

Dear Mr. Champion:

Thank you for considering Dogco as a partner in your success! We are qualified vendors with an extensive track record in the pet industry. I've attached our POOPS specification sheet to this email for your review.

To custom-craft a unique distribution plan designed to help BARK grow and profit, I'll need about ten minutes of your time. I'll phone you Monday afternoon to see if you'd prefer to meet in person or talk on the phone to go over your distribution needs.

Thank you again for contacting Dogco. We look forward to the opportunity to transform your distribution system into a highly reliable and incredibly profitable operation.

Gibson Gator

This email follows the Plan A format, yet it is decidedly a sales letter. Because he is responding to Champion's inquiry, Gator has no need to use an attention-getting headline. Champion is already paying attention. Gator is smart to begin with the main idea (the answer to Champion's question). Gator's focus on his reader's needs and his clear call for action (I'll phone you Monday) turn a "telling" message into a "selling" one.

Remember that corporate meeting planner who is planning her sales rally? Here is a finished version of the letter the salesperson sends. Notice how the writer includes the four qualities of a power-packed sales letter:

- Gets attention with a reader-focused short action statement
- Builds interest with word pictures
- Educates the reader on features that are important to him or her
- Explains the action step

Dear Martha Sue,

Your sales team—pumped and ready to \$ell more!

Picture your sales team—2000 strong—learning about the potential and possibilities of your incredible new product. Watch the excitement grow as the music pulsates from the 32 music stations in the ballroom. Feel their enthusiasm as the 150-foot screen surrounds them with your video production, showcasing your product to perfection. Hear them cheer when your executive team tells them the product is ready to go, today, now . . . and that profits are waiting to be made.

*Selecting **the perfect site for your sales rally** is critical to the success of your new product rollout. Attendees comfortable in their surroundings, relaxed, pampered, and mingling together help synergy grow, excitement mount, and profits rise! Casa Pink offers you that perfect site!*

Here is what Karolyn Kibby, Meetings and Concierge Source, Scottsdale, Arizona, said about her meeting held here:

This was the best sales rally ever! Your hotel made it easy for the team to both have fun and focus on why they were there.

The pins your people wore were perfect motivators and appreciated by all! When you told me you paid attention to details, I never expected you to mean even the smallest ones!

Diane Carson, meeting planner at Safe Food Stores, said, Incredible! From the moment our salespeople walked in, your staff made sure they felt special. I have to admit I was a bit concerned about moving 2000 people from session to session within those short breaks, but you made it happen for us—flawlessly.

Casa Pink makes your meeting a success. Your sales team will be ready to “hit the streets” after the comfort and pampering they’ll receive here. For instance:

- *All rooms were remodeled this year and offer extra firm beds with fluffy pillows and comforters to ensure a good night’s rest.*
- *All rooms have easy-to-reach data ports (no ducking under the bed to find the telephone outlet!) and two phone lines to make it simple to connect to the Internet and their customers at the same time.*
- *All meeting rooms are located on one level, making it easy and convenient to keep the energy moving from the excitement of the general session to the smaller learning sessions.*
- *Wait until they see the new spa!! The spa has 18 treatment rooms, so we can relax 18 of your attendees at a time! (Of course, many more can be de-stressing in our steam room, warm water waterfall, and private relaxation rooms.)*

I’ll call you Wednesday, August 26, to see how we can help you create excitement and success and motivate your sales team to have the best year ever!

Sincerely,

Blake Reagan

A clear, powerful action statement is the only way to move the reader to take action.

Do you recall the letter that Deborah and Candace wrote, given in Chapter 13? After providing the rest of the details that mattered to Mr. William, their prospect, here is how they specified action:

Mr. William, there is always a certain level of apprehension when choosing a new resort for your event. Your industry peers rank Westin LaPaloma Resort as #1 in Meeting Planner Satisfaction of all Westin Hotels. You can have peace of mind in knowing that you've made a great decision.

I'll call you Tuesday, September 9, to confirm our next step, and I can be reached directly at 555-555-5555 or email@westin.com with any immediate questions. Thanks for your consideration!

*Best Regards,
Deborah Weiss*

P.S. A personal visit is the best way to see what a great fit your program will be here, and you have an open invitation to join us for a site inspection. You can also take a look at the Resort by clicking on www.westin.com.

Did you notice that both Blake and Deborah set the day and date that they would call? Compare this with sloppy, vague endings like, “I’ll call you within the next two weeks.” “Within the next two weeks”—is this whenever it happens to be convenient for you to call? Isn’t your prospect worth more of a commitment than that?

Some Say It Won't Fly

Some workshop participants claim that they can't include a specific date. They tell me that they have little control over their day. They tell me stories of spending more time with a client than expected and running late, or encountering hassles with late planes and long security lines. It's more likely, they tell me, that they'll miss the date and won't make the phone call in a timely manner. They are afraid to commit to a specific date.

That is all true, and all of that happens. We have days that spin out of control. The car breaks down, and when, after waiting for help, we're finally on our way, the front tire blows, and while we're changing the tire, we get grease all over the perfect business casual attire we chose to wear to the staff meeting and have to stop at the mall to pick up some new slacks and a shirt/blouse to match, and while we're there we take 2 more seconds to pick up our mother's birthday gift, which was supposed to be ready yesterday, and it will be wrapped in 5 more minutes, and we just pay for it unwrapped, and we arrive at the staff meeting only to discover that the regional director has made a surprise visit and would appreciate an overview of the presentation on the team's sales goals, which is due next week, today, and so we have to excuse ourselves to work on the PowerPoint presentation! Those promised phone calls probably won't get made that day! We've had days like that.

We've cancelled appointments and missed meetings, we've been late for our kids, and we've missed flights, but for the most part, when we plan to do something, we do it. Failing to plan, however, is planning to fail.

What is the use of writing a fabulous business letter and then not fabulously following up? Why lose the opportunity to show-

case your responsiveness and attention to detail by following up when it suits your fancy, “within the next two weeks”?

Use your database to remind you when to call. Check your calendar and schedule the date you’ll follow up with the client. Plan it and do it. You’ll own the competitive edge, and you’ll show your customer how responsive and trustworthy you are.

What if the day you choose is one of those days that totally goes wacky?

When your day spins out of control, call the prospect the next morning, or as soon as you are able to. He probably wasn’t waiting to exhale until you phoned. Don’t make a big deal out of your delay. Say something friendly, like, “Good morning, Lily. Yesterday got away from me, and I had promised to phone you. Is this a good time to talk about your . . .?” You’ll still win points (enough to beat out the person who is calling sometime within the next week!) with your follow-through.

A racecar driver once said that if you’re going to win, you have to finish. Finish your sales letter by making the next step clear and easy to accomplish. Follow up like the professional you are. You’ll be in the winner’s circle in no time!

This page intentionally left blank.



PART FOUR

PUTTING IT ALL TOGETHER

Powerful writers use every resource possible to connect with their readers. They don't throw obstacles in the path of understanding, and they don't ever make themselves look bad or foolish or inept.

Regardless of the type of document or the medium used to convey the message, powerful writers write to get results. They choose powerful word tracks, and they use correct grammar and proper punctuation. They “seek first to understand and then to be understood,” yet they always, always make themselves understandable. Whether in an email or a standard business document, correct punctuation and grammar help your reader to grasp your message and indicate your attention to detail.

The strategies in the next chapters will help you polish and perfect your writing.

This page intentionally left blank.

The Conversational Test

Four basic premises of writing: clarity, brevity, simplicity, and humanity.

William Zinsser

There's no sentence that's too short in the eyes of God.

William Zinsser

The difference between the right word and the wrong word is like the difference between lightning and the lightning bug.

Mark Twain

Why is it that nice, normal people feel the need to use puffed up and pompous language when they write? For some reason (perhaps a fear that we're not good enough or smart enough), many of us, when given the choice between the words *help* and *assist* or *demonstrate* and *show*, prefer the fancier ones. The secret to style is to be you, not to be fancy.

Write to express, not to impress.

Impress readers with what you know instead of the fancy words you know. A simple idea is still simple, no matter how fancy the dressing. A powerful idea expressed clearly and plainly can set the world on fire. Winston Churchill didn't say, "Hemoglobin, exertion, perspiration, and expostulation." He said, "Blood, toil, sweat, and tears." (In fact, recall your favorite quotation. Whether it is Martin Luther King Jr., "I have a dream," Patrick Henry, "Give me liberty or give me death," John F. Kennedy, "Ask not what your country can do for you but what you can do for your country," or even that famous philosopher, Jewel, "In the end, only kindness matters," their most impressive thoughts are conveyed with the simplest words.)

Many years ago, the *Wall Street Journal* ran an article called, "Conversation: The Key to Better Writing." The article asked, "Why does the man [man is a collective noun; women are included too] who seems so direct and clear on the phone make himself sound mechanical, pompous and stilted in his writing?"

Some writers don't trust their ability to write naturally, and they lack confidence about their writing skills. (How many high school English teachers does it take to make one student insecure? Just one—the one who reads the student's "D" composition out loud or posts it on the bulletin board for everyone to see.)

Other writers believe, according to the same WSJ article, that fancy words and "puffy sentences will make them appear more educated or more polished" than they feel they are.

Trust yourself to use the conversational test. Ask yourself: Would I say it like this to my reader if I were talking to her? If you

wouldn't say it this way, please don't consider writing it this way. (Not everything you can say, however, should you write! Write the way you speak and then clean it up, if necessary.) If you have to look for a replacement word in the thesaurus, don't. Use the comfortable word, the word you can trust to mean what you think it means.

If you have the vocabulary of a 3-year-old, this advice really stinks. If, on the other hand, you have the vocabulary of an eighth-grade student or better, you have the vocabulary you need to write a powerful, successful, effective sales letter, proposal, or email to anyone at any level.

Almost every state in the United States mandates that health-related information be written at a fourth-grade reading level. Most newsstand magazines are written at a fifth-grade level. Newspapers vary between a fourth-grade reading level (*USA Today*) and an eighth-grade level (the *Wall Street Journal*).

These reading levels are based on Rudolph Flesch's book *The Art of Readable Writing*. Before I was even born (which is a long time ago), Flesch developed a paper-and-pencil mathematical formula based on the number of syllables in a word and the number of words in a sentence. Today most computer software programs (more or less) use this decades-old formula to calculate readability.

I am not suggesting that we purposely write for the most simple among us. I am suggesting that in an overwhelmed world, the best way to get your message across is to present it in an easy-to-understand manner. The longer the sentence and the fancier the words, the longer it takes your reader to take in the message. A sentence like, "I will help you get more business and sell more products," gets through the clutter. Your reader can fully and quickly comprehend the message. A more "erudite" sentence like, "I will

assist you in achieving greater profitability and transacting additional revenue through viable product sales” (I used the thesaurus for that!) is ridiculous.

Fanny Brice’s advice is as true for writing today as it was for a much simpler time: “Let the world know you as you are,” she said, “not as you think you should be—because sooner or later, if you’re posing, you will forget the pose and then where are you?”

Outdated Words and Phrases

Here are some outdated or imprecise words and phrases and their replacements to remind you to keep your writing conversational and real.

Bad: ASAP. When is “as soon as possible”? Is this before or after the next phase of the moon? Help your reader give you the result you want by providing specific dates.

Better: Please sign this and fax it back to me before January 13. If I have it back by then, I can have your mortgage papers ready for the transfer scheduled for the 15th. (Notice how the deadline was justified with an explanation. Depending on the circumstances, it may be too pushy to tell your reader exactly when she must do something. By providing the rationale for your request, you make the reader understand why she must be responsive to you.)

Bad: In the near future. When is this? It sounds like the twilight zone to me!

Better: Date the action.

Bad: Attached please find. The dictionary defines the word *find* as *to locate*. You aren't sending the reader on a treasure hunt.

Better: I've attached . . . ; attached is . . .

Bad: I would like to thank you. If you would like to thank the reader, do it! You don't need a drum roll announcing your intention. (Also, notice how self-centered this is. Even in a thank-you the writer has to talk about himself first.)

Better: Thank you for . . .

Bad: Just to thank you. The word *just* diminishes the value of the thank-you. When you want to thank someone, why make it less than it is?

Better: Thank you for . . .

Bad: Thanking you in advance. How can we thank someone before he's done anything for us? Thank him after the fact and when you mean it.

Better: Thank you for . . .

Bad: Acknowledge receipt of. Who talks like this?

Better: Thank you for . . . ; I've received . . .

Bad: As per your request. When was the last time you used this phrase in speaking? *Per* is Latin for *through*. Use English when you're writing to people who speak English.

Better: As you requested; as we discussed.

Bad: Please feel free to call. No one gets a *free feel!* This expression went out with Benjamin Franklin.

Better: Please call; I'll call you.

Bad: Please do not hesitate to call. Do you think this phrase will get them so excited that they'll jump up on their desks and shout, "I don't have to hesitate"?

Better: Please call; I'll call you.

Bad: Needless to say. If it's *needless to say*, why say it?

Better: Omit.

Bad: It is evident that. This one is almost as bad as "needless to say." If something is evident, why repeat it? *Apparently* also falls into this category. If something is apparent, there is no need to repeat it.

Better: Omit.

Bad: As far as I know. This is called a weasel phrase. (Its sister is "to my knowledge.") We use it to weasel out of responsibility or accountability. Tell them what you do know.

Better: Based on my discussion with Michael, Melissa, and Mercedes, here are the figures.

Bad: Obviously. Mario Pei proved that when we read the word *obviously*, there is an increase in blood pressure and pulse rate. Readers feel insulted and angry when this word is used.

Better: Omit.

Bad: More than happy to. How can we be *more than happy*? This would have to be an orgasmic state, and most of us don't get to write about that in business!

Better: Happy to, pleased, delighted.

Here are more phrases that fall into this category of outdated or pompous expressions. Omit them.

As I'm sure you know

Honestly

In all honesty

It goes without saying

May I take this opportunity to . . . ?

Permit me to say

This is to inform you

To tell the truth

Would You Say It Like This to Your Reader?

Prefer the conversational word to the fancier version. Here is a list of pompous words and their more natural replacements.

Above-mentioned	Above
Accordingly	So
Cease	Stop
Cognizant	Aware
Commend	Praise, congratulate
Conclude	End, close
Construct	Make
Deem	Think, consider
Discontinue	Stop, end
Disincentive	Penalty
Effectuate	Effect
Endeavor	Try
Equivalent	Equal
Finalize	End, conclude, finish, complete, settle, make final (Be careful of all words)

that end in the suffix *-ize*. These words are formed through a process called *back formation*. We start with a word and think we can stick a suffix on it and make a better word.)

Formulate	Form, think
Hence	So
Herein	In this, here
Herewith	Enclosed, attached
Initial	First
Initiate	Begin, start
In re	About, regarding, concerning
In receipt of	I have received
Orientated	Oriented (Be careful of those suffixes again.)
Preventative	Preventive
Prioritize	Rank, rate, list
Pursuant to	According to (or omit)
Remuneration	Pay, money
Subsequent to	After, following
Substantiate	Support, back up
Sufficient	Enough
Ubiquitous	Widespread, all over
Utilization	Use

Use English

Why would a person who doesn't speak Latin, understand Latin, or read Latin use Latin words when writing a business letter or creating an e-message? Here is my rule of thumb: If your reader speaks

Latin, go for it. This goes for French, too. If the reader speaks English, use English.

Bona fide	Genuine, real, authentic
Circa	Around, about
E.g.	This is an abbreviation of two Latin words. I have no idea what those words are! Use either <i>for example</i> or the English abbreviation for example, <i>Ex.</i> , instead.
I.e.	Again, I have no clue to what this abbreviates! It means <i>that is</i> . Use either <i>that is</i> or the colon (:).
In lieu of	Instead of, rather
Modus operandi	Method (Unless, of course, you've committed a crime and you're writing about your M.O.!)
Per	Through, according to
Per diem	Daily, each day
Per se	As such, as is

Redundancies Are Redundant

Here are commonly used redundant phrases:

Actual experience	Experience
Add up	Add
Advance planning	Plan; planning (Can you plan backwards?)
Advance reservations	Reservations
After the conclusion of	After

Almost similar	Similar
Along the lines of	Like
Any and all	Any <i>or</i> all (not both)
Appreciate in value	Appreciate
Ask the question	Ask
At about	At <i>or</i> about (not both)
ATM machine	ATM <i>or</i> automatic teller machine
Basic fundamentals	Basics <i>or</i> fundamentals (not both)
Big in size	Big
Brief moment	Moment
But however	But <i>or</i> however (not both)
Cancel out	Cancel
Circle around	Circle
Collaborate together	Collaborate
Combine together	Combine
Completely full	Full
Consensus of opinion	Consensus
Depreciate in value	Depreciate
Despite the fact that	Despite, in spite of, although
Distance of 5 yards	5 yards
Due to the fact that	Because
Each and every	Each <i>or</i> every (not both)
Empty space	Space
Endorse on the back	Endorse
End result	Result
Entirely destroyed	Destroyed
Exactly the same	The same, identical
Exact replica	Replica
Fact of the matter	Fact
False illusion	Illusion
Few in number	Few

Filled to capacity	Filled
Final conclusion	Conclusion
First and foremost	First
First of all	First
Foreign imports	Imports
For the purpose of	For
Free gift	Gift
Good benefit	Benefit
Grand total	Total
Heir apparent	Heir
If and when	If <i>or</i> when (not both)
Inadvertent oversight	Oversight
In order to	To
In the interim	Omit
Invited guest	Guest
Is of the opinion that	Thinks, believes
Jewish rabbi	Rabbi
Look back in retrospect	Look back
Mandatory requirements	Mandatory <i>or</i> required (not both)
Meet together	Meet
Month of November	November
Most unique	Unique
Natural instinct	Instinct
Other alternative	Alternative
Past experience	Experience
Positive identification	Identification
Postponed until later	Postponed
Preplanned	Planned
Previous experience	Experience
Purple in color	Purple
Refer back	Refer

Separate entities	Entities
Seven in number	Seven
Technical jargon	Jargon
Total destruction	Destruction
True fact	Fact
Two opposites	Opposites
Two twins	Twins
Unexpected emergency	Emergency
Unintentional mistake	Mistake
Whether or not	Whether

Stephen King says, “Good writing is about making good choices when it comes to picking the tools you plan to work with.” Choose the word and the usage that will help your reader—your prospect, your customer, your colleague, your boss—understand your intent and your message. Choose the word that will help your reader give you the result, respect, and recognition you deserve.

Choose the Correct Word

If lawyers are disbarred and clergymen defrocked, doesn't it follow that electricians can be delighted, musicians denoted, cowboys deranged, models deposed, tree surgeons debarked, and dry cleaners depressed.

Virginia Ostman

Words are confusing not only because they mean one thing to one person and something different to the next, but also because the English language is confusing. Words can sound alike and look alike, but have different meanings, and the proper use of words sometimes seems to follow no rules at all.

The reality is that many of the people you write to don't have a clue about which is the right word to choose. When you write to people who know you've used the wrong word, however, your credibility and your value fall faster than a broken elevator in an earthquake. The author William Zinsser said it best when he said, "Bad writing makes bright people look dumb."

Use this style guide to increase the respect and recognition that others give you. By selecting the best and most correct words, you'll make the impression you want and get the results you deserve.

Sue's Fairly Flippant Style Guide

A/an. Use *a* before a consonant (*a puppy*) and *an* before a vowel (*an animal*). The letter *h* can cause havoc. If the *h* is silent, so that the first sound is that of a vowel, use *an* (*an honorable discharge*); if it is sounded, use *a* (*a house*).

Abbreviations/Acronyms. Abbreviations always used to have periods separating the letters (*I.R.S.*, *U.N.*). To type them more quickly, or to make them more attractive from a graphic design viewpoint, these periods are now often omitted. Abbreviations are correctly written either way.

Acronyms are different from other abbreviations in that they can always be pronounced like a word (*MADD*, *KISS*, *NATO*). Unless you are certain your reader knows what your abbreviations and acronyms mean, spell them out immediately after using them: *KISS (Keep It Simple, Sweetheart!)*.

Adjectives. Adjectives describe nouns. (*This is a great book.*) Most adjectives come before the word they describe.

Adverbs. Adverbs describe verbs. (*His profits rose greatly as a result of the book.*) They almost always end in the suffix *-ly*. The writer William Safire says that most words that end in *-ly* are not only needless but often offensive. Stephen King, in his book *On Writing*, agrees, and in much more graphic terms. Before you use a word ending in *-ly*, ask yourself: Will this help my reader?

Among/between. Use *between* when you're talking about two people or things; use *among* for three or more. (*The dessert was divided among the three staff members. Bill couldn't decide between the cheesecake and the pie.*)

And. Should you start a sentence with *and*? It's up to you. Sometimes it just seems to convey your message more effectively. If you struggle with the use of the correct word or have difficulty with grammar, avoid doing this. If you choose to start a sentence with the word *and*, make sure it is a complete sentence and not a phrase. *And William thought better of it* is acceptable. *And William* is not. (See *conjunctions*.)

And/or. Decide whether the meaning is clearer with the word *and* or the word *or*. Then use the correct word. The slash only confuses the reader. (*She could finish her phone calls or her paperwork before rushing to catch her flight. She could finish her phone calls and her paperwork before rushing to catch her flight.*)

Apostrophe. This punctuation mark is used either to show ownership or to indicate a missing letter.

- Possession:
Buster's paw was wet. (a paw that Buster has)
Charles's cousin had a baby. (the cousin of Charles)
- Contraction
Isn't = is not; I'm = I am; we'll = we will; it's = it is

Between you and me/between you and I. *Between you and me* is correct—always. (*This is between Dave and me. Between you and me, I think it's wrong to . . .*)

But. *But* usually comes in the middle of a sentence and should be avoided unless your intention is to devalue the first

part of the sentence. (*You're right, but . . .*) Whenever you're tempted to use the word *but*, think of your own butt! That is the part of your anatomy you're thinking from when you devalue another person's idea. (See *conjunctions* and *however*.)

Capitalization. The trend is to use fewer capital letters. I grew up capitalizing both the street name (*Barkley*) and its type (*Barkley Ave.*). Today, some writers capitalize only the name of the street and use lowercase letters for the type (*Barkley avenue*). It looks weird to me, although both are correct.

Whether you prefer the newer conventions or the older way, rules of capitalization apply even when sending email. It's true that email is a less formal communication medium and is a mix between a letter and a conversation. The challenge to the writer is remembering that anything that is put in writing can come back to haunt and hurt you. A quick e-message to a colleague can end up in her supervisor's inbox and be forwarded to your department manager. An email to a customer can land on your regional manager's desk and in the president's mailbox (all within seconds).

Yes, there are times when you're sending an email that you really don't need to worry about rules of grammar and punctuation. Those times are few. Your correspondence, whether delivered by computer or by postal worker, reflects on your professionalism. It just isn't worth taking the chance.

- Proper names, the first word of every sentence, and important words in a title are always capitalized.
- *Mom, Uncle, Grandpa*, and similar words are capitalized only when they take the place of the name, start a sentence, or when they serve as a title (*Uncle Zachary, Grandpa Phil*). I wouldn't capitalize *mom* unless it takes

the place of saying my mom's name, Lois. *My mother* is not capitalized because I wouldn't say *My Lois and I*.

- Seasons and directions aren't capitalized. (*The spring is my favorite season. When you get to the deli, turn east.*) If you use direction words to indicate a part of the country, the direction word becomes a proper name and is capitalized. (My husband is from the *South* and I'm from the *North*.)

Center/centre. You can spell it either way, although *center* is the preferred American English spelling and *centre*, the correct English English spelling. If you work in the United States, it makes sense to me to prefer the American spelling. (Of course if your building is the Rockefeller Centre building, you'll need to adopt that fancy version.)

Colon. The colon (:) is not only a part of the digestive system, but also an important punctuation mark that signals to the reader: Pay attention! Something is to follow. Colons introduce lists, quotations, or important comments.

A colon is the correct punctuation mark when opening a formal business letter or proposal. If you address your letter or email formally (*Dear Mr. Crenshaw:*), you must follow the salutation with a colon. If you address it less formally (*Dear Ben,*) and you are sending it through the postal service, you can correctly use either a colon or a comma. When you are writing an informal email, a comma or a dash (—) after the name is acceptable.

Comma. The comma indicates that the reader needs to take a breath; the reader needs to pause momentarily to understand the sentence. Use a comma whenever the sentence is confusing

without one. (There are many “rules” for comma usage. This will be a good start for you.)

The comma and the period are not interchangeable. A comma is a mere breath. A period is a full stop. *I'll send you the materials I promised you, have a good day* is wrong. A comma separates or connects two similar thoughts. *I buy a cup of coffee every morning, though I know it is much cheaper to brew it at home* is correct. Refer to Strunk and White's book *The Elements of Style* for more information on comma usage. It is still the best little punctuation and grammar book around.

Use the comma in lists of three or more items to avoid confusion. Here are examples:

Sam will bring the macaroni, cheese and slaw. Is Sam to bring three items (item one—macaroni; item two—cheese; item three—slaw) or is he to bring two items (macaroni as item one, and cheese and slaw as item two)?

What if it had been written: Sam will bring the slaw, macaroni and cheese? Now how many items will Sam bring? Use the comma to avoid confusion.

Please divide my estate between Michael, Adam and Douglas. Without a comma between Adam and Douglas's name, the attorneys will have a field day with this statement. It seems that Michael gets half and Adam and Douglas share the other 50 percent! Had the sentence been written with the inclusion of the comma, “Please divide my estate between Michael, Adam, and Douglas,” each of the boys would receive one-third.

Compare to/compare with. When things are similar, use *compare with*. When they aren't similar, use *compare to*. (*Our new English springer spaniel can be compared with our old dog in only one way: They are both sweet as sugar. Champion's energy*

level, even when he was a puppy, can't be compared to Buster's! Buster has enough energy for three dogs!)

Conjunctions. These words (*although, and, but, for, if, nor, or, so, yet*) link two ideas or clauses. Usually a comma comes before the conjunction. (*I'm getting older, yet the Botox keeps me looking young!*)

Convince/persuade. Most people use these interchangeably today. My software program, however, insists on the “correct” usage and changes *persuade* to *convince* when there is action involved. (*He persuaded me to buy it at full price.*) When you use the word *persuade*, you also use the word *to*. Use *convince* when thought is involved. (*He convinced me that it would be a wise investment.*) When you use the word *convince*, you often use the word *that*.

Could care less/couldn't care less. You *couldn't care less* (about it).

Dash. Dashes can take the place of commas in informal writing. They also give emphasis to a point: *He wanted to talk to her—without her mother around!* Dashes often come in pairs: *He wanted to talk to her—without her mother around—to see if she would marry him.* It is incorrect to write: *He wanted to talk to her—without her mother around, to see if she would marry him.* Avoid getting dash happy!

Ellipsis. What an unusual word for such a great punctuation mark! When you leave out material, use the ellipsis to indicate the missing words or to create suspense. (*The computer has aggravated him for days . . . today he is going to buy a new one.*) Just as with dashes, avoid getting ellipsis happy. (Be particularly

careful of using the ellipsis too often in email writing. Some emails look like Morse Code with all the ...!)

Exclamation point. Many well-respected writers are disgusted with, hate, and disdain (big word, but that is what they do) the use of exclamation points. They say that our words themselves should convey the excitement and enthusiasm, and it is only the weak writer who needs to resort to such a trivial mark. That said, I love exclamation points! They are a quick shorthand for the reader and are so much better than a little smiley face ;-).

Fewer/less. *Fewer* is used with numbers and anything that can be counted. *Less* is used with amounts and things that can't be counted. (*I would have fewer pounds on my hips if I ate less!*)

First/Firstly. It's *first, second, third*. There is no need to add the *-ly* suffix to a number. (I had a boss once who went to the number *ninthly* before reaching *finally!*)

However. You can use *however* at the beginning of a sentence (with a comma right after it) or in the middle (with two commas surrounding it or a semicolon in front of it and a comma after it). Use *however* sparingly, please. It means *but*. (See *but*.)

Indenting. You can do it or not. Before computers aligned everything for us, indenting five spaces was the signal to the reader that a new paragraph was beginning. If you're quoting a long passage, indent the entire quote. Your tab button takes care of everything.

Italics. Use italics for titles and words of special significance (as in this section).

Its/it's. *It's* is a contraction of *it is*. It always means *it is*. *Its* is a pronoun and is not used often because an inanimate object has to own something for it to be used. My dog is neutered, so since he (medically) is no longer a boy, I guess I could say, *its tail*. (Notice that I couldn't say *it's tail* because that would mean *it is tail*.) You can see how awkward that is. If I talk about my computer, I can say, *its lights are flashing*.

Lay/lie. I can never remember whether Bob Dylan sings “*Lay* across my big brass bed” or “*Lie* across . . .” It should be *lie* unless he is singing in the past tense. I still don't get these, so I avoid using the words. People always think you're talking dirty anyway, even when the words are used properly! Here it is for those of you who are braver than I:

Lay (to set down):

I lay the plates on the table.

I laid the plates on the table yesterday.

I was laying the plates on the table.

Lie (to be in a horizontal position):

I lie awake

He lies awake, too.

I lay down yesterday.

I had lain down but couldn't sleep.

I was lying there quietly when Buster jumped on me.

Numbers. Consistency is the key here. It used to be that all numbers one through ten were spelled out. (Sometimes, before typewriters, and sometimes still in legal documents, the numbers were both written as numerals and spelled out to make sure the numeral wasn't misunderstood.) It's fine to use either the spelled-out word or the numeral, as long as you're consistent.

Use the numeral for percentages (12 percent) in all but the most formal writing.

Sums are best written as \$2000, not \$2000 dollars (redundant) or \$2000.00 (unless, of course, there is change).

Add an *s* to make a number plural. The apostrophe isn't necessary (the *1970s*, the Roaring '20*s*).

Only. Put *only* immediately before the word you're talking about, or you'll be saying something you don't mean:

Only Megan wrote the report. (She was the sole author.)

Megan *only* wrote the report. (She wrote it, though she didn't research or present it.)

Megan wrote *only* the report. (She wasn't part of the rest of the project.)

Parentheses. Use parentheses for a comment that is less significant than the statement you're adding it to. Each of these parenthetical comments is punctuated properly.

When one door shuts (as long as it doesn't hit you in the face), another will open.

When one door shuts, another will open (somewhere else).

When one door shuts, another will open. (This is what my mother always told me.)

Plurals. Good luck! Every rule is broken when it comes to plurals! Use your spell-check feature or check a dictionary.

Prepositions. You can both start and end a sentence with a preposition. If you want a second opinion, check Strunk and White's book *The Elements of Style*, or, for an even higher source, the Bible (*In the beginning . . .*).

Pronouns. Here are a few tricks:

- When you're wondering whether *I* or *me* is right, drop the other person's name: *Tammy and I* (or is it *me*?) *work late every night. I work late? Me works late? Tammy and I work late.*

Or: *Julie needs McKennah and I* (or is it *me*?) *to look at this. Julie needs me to look at? Julie needs I to look at? Julie needs McKennah and me to look at this.*

- *Myself* is a reflexive pronoun and never takes the place of *I*. The word *I* must appear earlier in the same sentence (or be understood) so that *myself* can reflect on it. *I, myself, prefer M & Ms. I've been really tough on myself lately, trying to avoid all chocolate!*

Quotation marks. The proper use of quotation marks depends on whether you were taught in the English or the American tradition. (Where you went to school isn't the question—what style your teacher learned and taught you is.) The American custom is to place all commas and periods and all exclamation points and question marks *that belong to the quotation* inside the quotation marks. Only when the punctuation doesn't make any sense does it go inside the quotation mark.

In this example, *Did she ever say, "I love you"?* *I love you* isn't the question; *did she ever say those words* is, so the question mark is placed outside the quotation.

Use the American style if you live in the United States.

Semicolon. The semicolon (;) provides the basis for a winking smiley face [;-)]; links an idea with its explanation (I owe it to my daddy; the man who taught me everything I know about true customer service); separates ideas (as I'm demonstrating here); and separates a list when commas are being used. (*Deena, Janet, and Sonya are responsible for the holiday*

event; Julie, Scotty, Samantha, and Cherisse will manage the golf tournament.)

Slash. Please *honor/respect* your *reader/buyer* and/or *avoid/eliminate* the use of the slash! Select the word you prefer and use it. Slashes are annoying.

That. Somewhere there is a rule for using *that* that makes sense. I just haven't found it! You have to trust yourself on this one. Read the sentence out loud and determine which way it sounds better—with or without the *that*. If you can read it and it flows nicely without the use of *that*, eliminate *that*.

To/too. *Too* means *also*. *To* doesn't.

Verbs. Use verbs that *act* rather than *show the action*.

Who's/whose. This is like *it's* and *its*. *Who's* is a contraction; the apostrophe indicates that a letter is missing. *Who's* means *who is*. (*Who's on the A list for Ron and David's party tomorrow night?*) *Whose* is the possessive form. (*Whose dog is barking?*)

Zero. When you're writing a long chain of zeros (\$22,000,000), make the check out to me. It may be better to write *\$22 million* instead, though. (Actually, you can do it any way you want as long as you don't leave out—or add—any zeros!)

Email Etiquette

Throughout this book, you've read strategies for writing strong, powerful, reader-centered letters, proposals, and e-messages. This bonus section concentrates on strategies and techniques that apply specifically and directly to email writing.

Email is still mail. It is a reflection of your professionalism, your concern, and your attention to detail. Your company's reputation is on the line with every e-message you send. Both internal and external messages are filed and forwarded.

E-messages are permanent (really permanent) records of your thoughts and actions. Lawyers can find emails you sent years ago and quote you verbatim. If you wrote the message in haste, in anger, or in frustration, your words (without the rest of the story) can derail your career.

Think of email as business casual. When business casual was first adopted, some people came dressed (or undressed) in tank tops and cutoffs. This may have been acceptable dress according to their definition of business casual, but it wasn't appropriate dress to increase their credibility or respect.

Here are 25 ideas to help you stay out of court, make a great impression, and build connection with your readers.

1. *Make your subject line as specific as possible.* The more precise your subject line, the easier it is for the reader to decide whether he or she will read your message now or later.

Instead of writing *Scotland Project*, be more specific. Try *Scotland Project—Oct 12 deadline*.

Instead of *Board Meeting*, try *Board Meeting—Hotel and Travel Details*.

By being this specific, you empower your reader to decide when it is best for her to deal with this issue. If your message indicates an Oct 12 deadline, and it's now October 10, she knows she had better pay attention. If it's September 9, she can manage her time accordingly.

2. *Send one-subject emails.* This may seem a bit cumbersome initially, but please do not ignore this idea! You will be amazed at how helpful this concept is for both you and your readers.

If I need to talk to you about three agenda items for the upcoming staff meeting, and I put them all in one email to you, and you need to ask Evie about one of the items, do you

- a. Forward my entire email to her?
- b. Cut and paste?
- c. Take the time to write a different email to her?

What if you need a few days to respond to one of the items, but you can deal with another one immediately? Do you file the entire email? Where?

If I send you three short emails, each with a precise subject line, you, my reader, can respond to, file, and

forward each one quickly and efficiently. This is a huge time saver for everyone.

3. *Think of your reader as always being in a rush.* Her goal is to answer as many e-messages as possible before moving on to what is important to her. Write so that your message cannot be misunderstood.
4. *The shorter the email, the more likely it is that it will be read.* When you're tempted to include information that may not matter to the reader, offer to send it to him if he would like to read it, or provide it in a separate attachment. Don't send it just because you have it.
5. *Rule of thumb: Keep your CC list shorter than the email you're sending!*
6. *Use the "To" heading for everyone who needs to act on the message.*
7. *Use the "CC" heading for anyone who must know what is going on.* (By the way, CC means carbon copy! Isn't it time we just used the letter C, for copy?)
8. *Use the "BC" heading only when you are sending newsletters, jokes (not that you ever would send these!), or other generic information.* The blind copy heading should *not* be used when you don't want people to know to whom you've also sent the message. If you don't want people to know who else is receiving a copy, send separate emails. Time consuming? Yes. Political, clever, and smart? Absolutely!

9. *Indicate “Urgent” in the subject line only when it is.* If everything you send is urgent, take a time management workshop. If your message isn’t really urgent, and you indicate that it is, you’ll be ignored when you really have an urgent message. *Important* is another word to use only when you mean it. Everything you send is important.
10. *Really bad news should never be sent in an email.* We have telephones and face-to-face conversations for that type of stuff.
11. *Limit abbreviation usage.* Just because you can write something silly like TTFN (ta-ta for now) or ROTRL (rolling on the floor laughing) doesn’t mean you should! It’s chat room slang. Some abbreviations have gained respectability, like BTW (by the way). Still, use them sparingly.
12. *Emoticons—those little happy, smiley, or sad faces such as ;-) or :-(—are like overused exclamation points.* Your words, theoretically, should convey the emotion you’d like your reader to understand. Before you hit the smiley face button, see if you need to improve the way you conveyed your message. Again, use emoticons sparingly and only as a last resort to ensure proper interpretation of your message.
13. *Use dates, not seasons, when sending email.* *Spring distribution* means something entirely different for your U.S. counterparts from what it means at your Australian offices.

14. *When you must respond to a message that has upset you, take your time before responding.* If you need to write back immediately, here are some ideas:

I disagree. I'll get back to you.

I have some other ideas on this. When can we talk?

How else can we do this? I'm not comfortable with this response.

Avoid writing when you're angry. Take the time to be thoughtful rather than reactive. Email lends itself to quick, thoughtless reactions. Don't become one of the casualties!

15. *Before responding to an e-message that you believe you may have misinterpreted, ask for clarification.* Your frame of mind determines the message you hear.
16. *Avoid one-word responses.* *Yes* may seem appropriate and efficient when you're responding to your reader's question. However, unless his message is automatically added to the thread of your response, be clearer. By the time he gets your response, he may have forgotten what he asked that you said *yes* to.
17. *Type out your name when you end your email.* MB-PolarPad doesn't tell me the writer's name; Michael Brady does.
18. *Email readers tend to be a sensitive group, with many idiosyncrasies.* Avoid writing all in CAPS. It's considered rude, like shouting. Avoid writing all in lowercase letters. It indicates that nothing is important.

19. *Humor doesn't travel well.* If you wouldn't take the time to copy the joke and pay the postage to mail it, don't email it. If you would take the time, mail it, don't email it. A subsidiary of a major oil company just paid out over 2 million dollars because a joke was allowed to be circulated on its intranet. I read the joke. It wasn't that funny and it also wasn't, *to my way of thinking*, inappropriate. That is the problem. What I think and what you think about the appropriateness (no off-color words, no play on words, etc.) has very little to do with what the other person thinks. The class action suit was settled on the basis that the joke's presence on the company system encouraged a "sexist work environment." If the joke is so good that others must hear it, tell it to them at the staff meeting. If you'd hesitate to do that for any reason, then you know exactly why you shouldn't be sending it over your email system.
20. *Humor doesn't translate well.* What is very funny in Britain may be foolish in China and insulting in Japan.
21. *Eliminate sports analogies.* What do you think these mean to your colleagues in France or Mexico?
 - Run it up the flagpole
 - Score big
 - Cover all the bases
22. *The word free in a subject line sounds too good to be true.* Your reader will see your message as spam and delete it.
23. *Tuesdays, Wednesdays, and Thursdays are the best days (in general) to send business-to-business sales messages.*

24. *Make your message look attractive.* If your email is likely to be forwarded, limit your line length to 60 characters. Forwarded messages are indented, usually eight spaces, and the mail system automatically adds hard returns where you may not have wanted them. Try to keep your entire message to 25 lines so your reader can read it in one screen without having to scroll.
25. *Reread your email before hitting the Send button.* Reread your email before hitting the Send button. Reread your email before hitting the Send button. Reread your email before hitting the Send button.

Email offers the skilled writer the opportunity to make a great impression, command respect, and boost success. Apply these ideas to feel confident about what you “put in writing.”

This page intentionally left blank.

Enhance Your Worth

Have no fear of perfection—you'll never reach it.

Salvador Dali

At first, Dali's words struck me as incredibly sad. How dismal life would be if we never thought we had a glimmer of hope of achieving perfection. The more I thought about his words, though, the more liberating they became to me. The reality is that we can't reach perfection. We can only do the best we can, and that is enough.

Once we give up trying to do things perfectly, we can enjoy doing them. And even though we may not be able to do things perfectly, we can do them better—much better—than we're doing them now.

We can get better results, we can help more people, and we can lead a more productive and successful life. That is what this book has been about. We can enjoy greater respect and recognition for our ideas and get better results every time we communicate.

Here are some ideas to think about:

- *Know your purpose for writing.* You can't get where you want to go if you don't know where you want to go.
- *Format your message for maximum impact.* Don't reinvent the wheel. Readers prefer having the main idea first when the message is simple. They need a bit of coddling and nudging to accept unpleasant news. They need lots of motivation to read and act upon a sales letter.
- *Focus on the reader and what is important to him or her.* Charles Revson said, "In the factory, we make cosmetics; in the store, we sell hope." Regardless of what you have to offer and how spectacular it may be, if your readers don't see what is in it for them, you won't connect, you won't have an impact, you won't sell.

Tom Monaghan, the founder of Domino's Pizza, said, "Do unto others as they would be done unto." From their perspective, from their shoes, from their pocketbook, from their heart, what matters? Offer them the solutions to their problems, challenges, and heartaches, and they'll close the deal for you.

- *Present your message in the most positive light possible.* People like hearing about what they can do, not what they can't. They want to know what criteria still need to be met, not what haven't been. Reframe your messages as pleasantly as is reasonable. This will not only change their outlook about your message, it may even change your own.
- *Words make a difference.* Write your message, even a quick email, so that if it appears in the company newsletter, people will respect you for it.

- *Bother with correct grammar and punctuation.* Many of your readers won't care, but those who do will value you and your abilities more than you can imagine.
- *Use conversational language.* If you believe your vocabulary isn't sufficient, take an e-learning class or enroll at your community college. Avoid using the thesaurus to make yourself look good. You are good already. Write it the way you would say it. Good writers rely on the third step in the writing process (revising) to catch anything that might not be in the best taste or be the most appropriate phrase.
- *Write thank-you notes.* They take so little time and mean so much to the receiver. Be as specific as possible about what you are thanking the person for. (*I appreciate how quickly you got me the answers to my questions. You made me look good. Thanks so much.*)

Jay Conrad, in his book *Guerilla Marketing*, suggests that the main reason sales are lost is not poor quality or rotten service. He says that “apathy after the sale” is the primary reason that businesses lose customers. Conrad writes that “a numbing 68% of all business lost in America is lost due to apathy after the sale.” (My guess is that this is also true in Mexico and Canada and Australia and England and, well, all over.) If a relationship is to grow, it needs to be tended.

When you take the time to make your customers feel appreciated; when they know that you are grateful for their business and the opportunity to serve them; when you take a moment to remind them that they selected the best, can expect the best, and will receive the best, you transcend buyer's remorse. Now they're doing busi-

ness with a trusted partner, not with someone who simply wants the business.

The lyrics to an old Shirelles song asked, “Will you still love me tomorrow?” Your customer and your colleagues wonder the same thing. The very best way to solidify any relationship is to show true appreciation for that relationship.

E. James Rohn said, “Kind words can be short and easy to speak, but their echoes are truly endless.”

- *Make a list of the ten most important ideas you discovered in this book.* Select the two most important of those ideas and write them on a Post-it note, in your Daytimer, or on a sticky note on your computer. Use those ideas. Concentrate on applying only those two new ideas. By the end of the month, you’ll own those techniques. They’ll be new habits that you won’t even have to think about using. Next month, select two more to implement. The month after that, choose two more.

Watch your sales and profits soar and your professionalism dramatically improve. You’ll feel confident about using your new sales tool—the written word—as you reap huge dividends in respect, recognition, and results!

Thank you for reading this book.

The value of an idea lies in the using of it.

Thomas Edison

Our grand illusion is not to see what lies dimly in the distance, but to do what lies clearly at hand.

Thomas Carlyle

Index

- alan*, 148
Abbreviations, 148, 162
Acronyms, 148
Action steps, 124–129
Adjectives, 148
Adverbs, 148
among/between, 149
an/a, 148
Analysis (*see* Prewriting stage; Revision stage)
Analytical side of brain, 20–21
and, 149
and/or, 149
Anger, in emails, 163
Apologies, avoiding, 73–80
Apostrophes, 149
Appreciation, 69–70
Art of Readable Writing, The (Flesch), 137
Attention-getting statement, 93–94, 98
Attention of reader, 93–100, 115
 conciseness and, 99–100, 122
 grabbing reader's eye, 95–99
 headlines and, 96, 98, 99–100, 103
 sender's name and, 93–94
 subject line and, 93–94, 96, 98,
 99–100, 160–161, 162
Auditory learners, 103

Bad news, 53–61
 buffers with, 54–56, 57–60, 62,
 63–64, 95
 positive approach to, 56–57, 61–66
Baldwin, David, 119
between/among, 149
between you and me/between you and I,
 149
Blackman, Jeff, 108
Blind copies, email, 161
Bott, Leo, Jr., 94
Brain hemispheres, 20–21
Brice, Fanny, 138
Brower, Charles, 93
Buffers, 54–56, 57–60, 62, 63–64,
 95
but, 149–150

Capitalization, 150–151
Carbon copies, email, 161
Carnegie, Andrew, 83
Carroll, Lewis, 3
Catharsis, 57
center/centre, 151
Churchill, Winston, 136
Cialdini, Robert, 108–111
Closing statements, 67–71, 123–131
Cold calls, 115
Colons, 151
Commas, 151–152
compare to/compare with, 152–153
Complaints, 55
Conciseness, 99–100, 122
Confidence, 136
Conjunctions, 153
Contractions, 149
Conversational language, 135–146
convince/persuade, 153
Cormier, Robert, 19
could care less/couldn't care less, 153

- Creative side of brain, 20–21
 Creativity. (*see* Writing stage)
 Crum, Tom, 53
- Dashes, 151, 153
 Delete key, 97
 Differentiation, 87–92
 Direct mail:
 email solicitations, 114–115, 164
 mailing lists, 114–115
 method of reading, 96–98, 118–122
 response rate for, 114–115
 time spent reading, 94
 Disappointing messages, 53–61
 buffers with, 54–56, 57–60, 62, 63–64, 95
 positive approach to, 56–57, 61–66
 Dowd, Maureen, 123
 Drucker, Peter, xiii, 61
- Earnest, Bill, 109
 Educating readers, 113–122
Elements of Style (Strunk and White), 152, 156
 Ellipsis, 153–154
 Email:
 BC (blind copy) heading, 161
 CC (carbon copy) heading, 161
 etiquette for sending, 159–165
 forwarded messages, 165
 graphic tools in, 87–88, 94, 120
 reading pattern for, 119
 rereading, 165
 scrolling through, 119
 sender's name/email address, 93, 94
 spamming and, 114–115
 subject line, 93–94, 96, 98, 99–100, 160–161, 162
 timing of sales messages, 164
 Emoticons, 162
 Emotion-laden words, 102
 Endings, 67–71
 English language, 142–143
 Exclamation point, 154
- FastCompany* magazine, 39, 89
 Feature delivery, 107–110
 needs of prospect and, 83–92, 113–115
 sensory words in, 102, 107
 social proof in, 108–111
 testimonials in, 109–110
fewer/less, 154
 “Fight or flight” phenomenon, 49
first/firstly, 154
 Flesch, Rudolph, 137
 Flores, Alma, 109
 Follow-up, 130–131
 Form letters, 115–118
 Forwarded messages, 165
 Franklin, Ben, 70–71
- Goethe, Johann Wolfgang von, 27
 Grammar, 85
 English language use, 142–143
 outdated language, 138–141
 pompous words, 141–142
 redundancies, 143–146
 word choice, 147–158
 Graphic tools, 87–88, 94, 120
- Habits, changing bad, 15–16
 Hand-brain pattern, 17
 Headings, 120
 Headlines, 96, 98, 99–100, 103
 Henry, Patrick, 136
 Hostile readers, 47–51
 avoiding metacommunication with, 49–51
 Plan B format and, 48, 54–64, 95
however, 154
 Humor, 164
- I/me*, 157
 Indenting, 154
Influence (Cialdini), 108–111
 Information overload, 119
 Interest of reader, 101–105
 Italics, 154
its/it's, 155

- Jewel, 136
 Jokes, 164
- Kanter, Rosabeth Moss, 107
 Karr, Ron, 84
 Kennedy, John F., 136
 Kinesthetic learners, 103
 King, Martin Luther, Jr., 136
 King, Stephen, 100, 146, 148
- Latin words, 142–143
lay/lie, 155
less/fewer, 154
 Liability, apologies and, 75–80
lie/lay, 155
 Litigation, apologies and, 75–80
- Mailing lists, 114–115
 May, Abby, 109
 McCord, Jane, 110
me/I, 157
 Meir, Golda, 67
Memoir of the Craft, The (King), 100, 148
 Metacommunication, 49–51
 Montapert, Alfred, 67
 Multitasking, 119
myself, 157
- Needs, of prospect, 83–92, 113–115
 Numbers, 155–156, 158
- Omission:
 apostrophes for, 149
 ellipsis for, 153–154
 One-word responses, 163
only, 156
or/and, 149
 Ostman, Virginia, 147
 Outdated language, 138–141
- Parentheses, 156
persuade/convince, 153
 Peters, Tom, 69–70
 Plan A format, 43–45, 95, 124, 126
 Plan B format, 48, 54–64, 95
 Plan C format, 95–100
 Plurals, 156
 Politeness, 97
 Pompous words, 141–142
 Positive approach:
 to bad news/disappointing messages,
 56–57, 61–66
 to closings, 67–71
- Possession, 149
 Postscripts (PS), 96
 Powell, Colin, 47
 Prepositions, 156
 Prewriting stage, 4–18
 clarifying writing purpose in, 5–7
 questions in, 4–5, 6–7, 9–18
 simplicity of, 15–16
 writing answers in, 16–18
- Pronouns, 156–157
 Proofreading tips, 32, 165
 PS (postscripts), 96
 Punctuation, 29
 apostrophes, 149
 colons, 151
 commas, 151–152
 dashes, 151, 153
 ellipsis, 153–154
 exclamation point, 154
 parentheses, 156
 quotation marks, 157
 semicolons, 157
 slashes, 158
- Purpose of writing, 5–7
- Questions, in prewriting stage, 4–5, 6–7,
 9–18
- Quotation marks, 157
 Quotations, 109–110
- Readability, 137–138
 Redundancies, 143–146
 Referrals, 109–110
 Reframing messages, 28
 Rejection letters, 68
 Respect, in routine messages, 42–43
Results Reports, 108

- Revision stage, 21, 27–35, 165
 - nature of, 28–29
 - proofreading tips in, 32, 165
 - punctuation in, 29
 - spelling in, 29–32
- Robbins, Anthony, 95–96
- Rockwell, John, 88
- Routine messages, 39–45
 - Plan A (routine document formula), 43–45, 95, 124, 126
 - problems with, 39–42
 - of salespersons, 42–45
- Sales letters:
 - effective, 23–25, 34, 90–92, 103–105, 117–118, 120–122, 126, 127–129
 - follow-up problems, 130–131
 - form letters, 115–118
 - ineffective, 12, 13–16, 33, 40, 84–86, 89–90, 115–117, 123, 125
 - timing of email, 164
- Sanders, Tim, 83
- Selling ideas:
 - building interest in, 101–105
 - delivering features in, 107–110
 - educating reader in, 113–122
 - grabbing attention in, 93–100, 115
 - needs of prospect and, 83–92, 113–115
(*See also* Sales letters)
- Semicolons, 157
- Sender's e-mail address, 94
- Sender's name, 93
- Sensory words, 102, 107
- Sentence length, 137–138
- Shakespeare, William, 73
- Simplicity of writing, 15–16
- Sincerity, 68–71
- Slashes, 158
- Smith, Sidney, 100
- Social proof, 108–111
- Sony, 88–89
- Spamming, 114–115
- Speed reading research, 118–122
- Spell-checking, 30–31
- Spelling, 29–32
- Sports analogies, 164
- Subheadings, 120
- Subject line, 93–94, 96, 98, 99–100, 160–161, 162
- Substantive proof, 108–111
- Taylor, Candace, 103–105
- Telephone calls:
 - cold calls, 115
 - politeness and, 97
- Templates, 115–118
- Testimonials, 109–110
- Thank-you notes, 69–70
- that*, 158
- to/too*, 158
- Twain, Mark, 101, 135
- Twain, Shania, 88
- “Urgent” subject line, 162
- USA Today*, 137
- Verbs, 158
- Visual learners, 103
- Vocabulary, 100
- Voltaire, 113
- Wall Street Journal*, 136, 137
- Weiss, Deborah, 103–105
- who's/whose*, 158
- Word choice, 147–158
- Word-of-mouth referrals, 109–110
- Writer's block, 20
- Writing process, 3–35
 - prewriting stage, 4–18
 - revision stage, 21, 27–35, 165
 - writing stage, 19–25
- Writing stage, 19–25
- Z pattern of reading, 118–122
- Zero, 158
- Zinsser, William, 135, 147



About the Author

Sue Hershkowitz-Coore, CSP, is available for consultation, corporate and association speaking engagements, and sales training workshops. She provides a variety of blended learning solutions to help your team enhance its professionalism, profits, and productivity.

To evaluate your writing effectiveness, you are invited to take a complimentary Power Writing assessment. Email the author at Sue@SpeakerSue.com to receive the current assessment link.

To schedule Sue to speak at your next conference or training program, visit her website, www.SpeakerSue.com, or call her Scottsdale, Arizona, office at 480-575-9711.