

**25**

**Success Strategies  
to Supercharge your  
Email and  
Business  
Writing Skills**



**ShirleyTaylor**



## INTRODUCTION

If you want to improve your email and business writing skills, you're in the right place. In this ebook, I've put together 25 super successful strategies that will help you every time you write.

Most of us are using email to stay in touch while we are travelling or working from home. We are using not just desktops and laptops, but also tablets and smart phones. We use email to communicate with friends and family as well as business clients and colleagues.

People whose jobs never used to involve writing skills are now finding themselves replying to dozens of emails every day. Many of us comment about the increasing quantity of the messages we receive, and the pressure to respond quickly. However, under such pressure, what is happening to the quality of the messages we exchange?

Just as a handshake and eye contact say something about you when you meet someone in person, the approach you take in email gives an impression as well. Whether you are writing a thank you note, a meeting reminder, a proposal, or a sales pitch, what you write and how you write it will affect what people think of you, as well as the image of your organisation.

I hope you'll practice the guidelines I've shared in this ebook. They will help you to develop great style and write clear, concise messages that will get great results. And when your messages look good, you and your organisation will look good too.

Enjoy!



**Shirley Taylor**

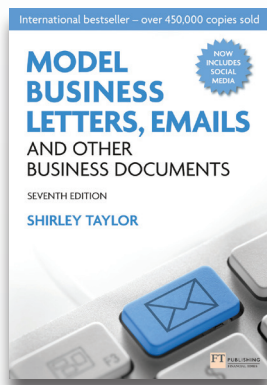
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## ABOUT THE AUTHOR



Shirley Taylor CSP (Certified Speaking Professional)\* has established herself as a leading authority in modern business writing and communication skills. She is the author of 12 successful books on communication skills, including the international bestseller, *Model Business Letters, Emails and Other Business Documents* seventh edition, which has sold over half a million copies worldwide and has been translated into several languages.

Widely-regarded as an expert in business writing and success skills, Shirley is a high-energy, high-content public speaker and trainer who educates, inspires, informs and motivates individuals to develop better relationships both orally and in writing. She puts a lot of passion and energy into her workshops and presentations to make sure they are entertaining, practical and informative, as well as a lot of fun.

With her friendly, down-to-earth style, she has a unique way of engaging with the audience, and is passionate about helping people commit to change. Audience members quickly see and share her passion and enthusiasm, and are motivated to use her strategies back at the workplace.

Originally from the UK, Shirley has lived and worked in Singapore, Bahrain and Canada. Based in Singapore now, Shirley is CEO of STTS Training Pte Ltd, a company highly-respected for its range of high-quality public and in-house communication training.

Shirley is proud to have been 2011-12 President of Asia Professional Speakers Singapore, a member of the Global Speakers Federation, and was awarded their Spirit of Service Award three years in a row. She now serves on the Executive Committee of the Global Speakers Federation.

\* Shirley Taylor is one of fewer than 700 Certified Speaking Professionals (CSP) in the world. CSP is the speaking profession's international measure of professional platform skill. The designation is globally recognised and awarded to speakers who have met strict criteria. This designation is achieved by fewer than 11% of professional speakers worldwide.

## DON'T HARRASS WITH YOUR HANDHELD

**Email doesn't only come to our desks.** *Many of us now carry email around with us on our mobile phones. This often results in being on call 24 hours a day, every day, even on weekends. Apart from never being free from the demands of work, this also leads to many more challenges.*

Messages typed with our thumbs often contain errors and can end up becoming quite terse. You might include a tagline such as 'Sent from my Blackberry', thinking that your recipient may be more forgiving of mistakes or brusqueness. But think again. This may not always work.

A friend told me recently that he now does 75 percent of his emailing through his mobile phone, and that he has adopted a new language for this new medium. Things he would not normally do on his computer, such as abbreviating words or not starting off with a greeting, he is actually doing on his electronic device.

Consider this message that he may have sent if he'd been sitting at his computer:

*Hi John*

*Great to hear from you. I'm glad you can come down to Singapore next week to discuss this exciting project. If you can let me have your proposal within the next couple of days, I can discuss it with our management and send you any urgent questions for consideration before we meet.*

*Look forward to seeing you.*

*Michael*

Now imagine how the message might look if he sent it from his electronic device:

*Pls send yr proposal so I can put to mgnt and send you any q's. Tnks.*

*(Sent from my Blackberry)*

Do you see what I mean about the message becoming abrupt? It could actually ruin the personal rapport that Michael may have built up with his recipient. Such abbreviated message may also lead to more back and forth emailing to clarify, which may not be necessary if either of them had picked up the phone or if Michael had waited till he could give the message a more considered response.

**DANGER!**



Etiquette applies to messages sent from handhelds too. Avoid checking your mobile device during dinner, at a cinema or at a concert, in a meeting, in the playground with your children, and definitely not when out on a date!

## BUILD RELATIONSHIPS WITH YOUR WRITING

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**It's easy to get a customer once.** *The challenge is keeping the customer. You can keep customers by creating partnerships, by creating bonds. Effective writing will help.*

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In any communication, your aim must be to create an important connection, a special bond. This applies whether you are dealing with a person face-to-face, over the telephone, in business meetings, or through email.

You can develop great relationships and bonds if you remember these five important tips.

### 1. Use the customer's name

Everyone likes to hear their name, so use it. Begin your messages with a greeting and finish off with your name.

### 2. Avoid jargon

You may understand your technical jargon, but your reader may not. Simplify your language and your expressions.

### 3. Be friendly

You don't want to come across as apathetic or indifferent. Smile and show warmth in your emails – it will make a difference.

### 4. Be confident and competent

Don't beat about the bush. Be clear and courteous. And don't be hesitant or unsure. Avoid language like 'maybe' and 'perhaps'.

### 5. Show empathy

This is not the same as sympathy. Empathy means showing appreciation for the other person's point of view of problems, and a clear understanding of their feelings.

## DON'T TAKE EMAIL FOR GRANTED

**We are now sending more email messages than ever before.** *We even email people sitting at the next desk instead of walking a few steps. This familiarity and convenience is encouraging us to nurture sloppy, dangerous habits – habits that could ruin our reputations.*

- Careless emails, especially if you slander someone, could land you in court.
- Email is never completely private. Something you wrote could come back to haunt you.
- Email messages can be used in legal investigations or as evidence in lawsuits.
- Email passwords can be stolen.
- Email messages are monitored by your IT department.
- Violating company policies may cost you your job.
- Careless and sloppy emailing can tarnish your reputation.

### REMEMBER!



Before you hit 'send', ask yourself these important questions:

1. Could I say this to the reader's face?
2. Am I violating any policies or laws?
3. Would I want this message forwarded to someone else?
4. Is the information in a logical order and easy to read?
5. Am I writing this while angry or upset?
6. Will the reader know clearly what to do in response?
7. Will my message give a good impression of me?
8. Is email the best way to deliver this information?
9. Is email more appropriate than phone or face-to-face communication?
10. Will my message get the right results?

If your answers are 'yes', you can now hit 'send'!



## THANK YOU FOR WHAT?

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**I just don't get it.** *'Thank you and Regards' does nothing for me. It just tells me writer has given no thought to putting his personality into the message and just wants to be like all his colleagues and not stand out at all.*

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If you have been courteous throughout your message (and no matter what the circumstances, you must always be courteous) there should be no need to finish every email with 'Thank you' or, worse still, 'Thank you and Regards'. Thank you for what? Thank you for reading my message?

Think of something more proactive to close with. Like:

- Thanks for your help.
- Thanks for your patience.
- Thanks for your understanding.
- Thank you for your support.

Personally, I have never used 'Regards' and I never will. I find it boring, unfeeling and unnecessary. Why not make up your own personal close, or don't use a close at all? For example:

1. If you know you're going to see me next week:

*See you soon.*

*John*

2. If you want a reply from me:

*Hope to hear from you soon.*

*Sarah*

3. If someone has been helpful and has given you what you need:

*Thanks for your help.*

*Mark*

4. It's Friday:

*Have a great weekend.*

*Janice*

## LET READERS HEAR YOUR VOICE IN AN EMAIL

**With email, you can't see the sender,** so you can't read any clues that may help you to interpret the message, e.g. body language, facial expressions, tone of voice, gestures. Therefore. It's no wonder that so many people misunderstand or misinterpret what is written.

So many people have a normal conversation with someone on the phone, and then write an email in a stilted fashion, using words they would never use in speaking.

Compare these two messages. Which one will give a better impression and develop a better relationship?

1. *Dear John – We spoke this morning. Glad to note your problem is solved. If you require any further assistance please revert.*

*Thanks & Regards*

*Mary Lee*

2. *Hi John*

*Thanks for your call. I am so pleased we could find a solution for you. Good luck with future progress on this project.*

*I'll be here when I can help you again.*

*Mary*

### REMEMBER!



- Email should be used to help you build relationships, not break them. Don't undo all your good work on the phone by emailing in a different or unnatural style.
- In email you, only have words and tone, so you must learn how to use them to create your own email body language. When you learn to do this, you will be making a real connection – and that's what good customer relationships are all about.

## WRITE AS YOU SPEAK

**I am always amazed at some of the emails I receive** *using language like: Please kindly peruse the above-mentioned document, Kindly revert to me at your soonest, Appreciate your kind assistance in this matter, or The said report is attached herewith for your reference and perusal.*

When my workshop participants ask me if they can use such language, my answer is always: "Would you say it if you were speaking to someone?" They always laugh and say, "No!" And there lies the golden rule of writing: If you wouldn't say it, don't write it!

Check out these sentences that we often see in emails, and consider their modern equivalent:

- ✗ We refer to your email message.
- ✓ Thanks for your email.
- ✗ The above-mentioned workshop will be held next Tuesday, 4 May.
- ✓ This workshop will be held next Tuesday, 4 May.
- ✗ The below-mentioned goods will be despatched to you next Monday.
- ✓ These goods will be sent to you next Monday.
- ✗ Please furnish me with this information at your soonest.
- ✓ Please let me have this information soon.
- ✗ Kindly revert to me asap.
- ✓ I hope to hear from you soon.
- ✗ Please find attached herewith a copy of our latest catalogue for your reference and perusal.
- ✓ I am attaching our latest catalogue, and I hope you find it interesting.

### REMEMBER!



With email messages, we have only bare facts, without tone of voice, facial expressions, body language, or pauses. It makes sense to use writing that is as close as possible to spoken language. When you do this, you will put your personality and individuality into your message. This will help you to stand out make a greater connection.

### DANGER!



Many of my workshop participants say to me, "Shirley I use a very informal style when I'm speaking to people, but when I'm writing I have to use a more formal style, right?"

Wrong! It's the 21st century. We need to write in a natural way, not in a false, fake way that takes too much effort and sounds insincere. We should all be aiming to develop great relationships today, and our writing plays an important part in achieving this.

## CONSIDER YOUR READER WHEN YOU WRITE

**After you've written an important document**, *do you ever take off your head and put on the reader's? Doing so will help you a lot, especially if you consider how the reader will feel.*

Empathy is an important quality to remember in all business dealings. This is particularly so when writing email messages. When checking through your message before sending, always put yourself in your reader's position. Imagine how they will feel as they read your message. This can often make all the difference.

### REMEMBER!



You've written your message as the writer. Now take off your head and put on the head of the reader. Imagine how the reader will feel as they read your message. Ask yourself:

1. Is your message clear and concise?
2. Is there anything that could be misinterpreted?
3. Will anything create confusion or misunderstanding?
4. Have you beaten about the bush instead of getting to the point?
5. Does your email convey a good impression?
6. Is your message written in an appropriate tone?
7. Is the language appropriate considering your status and the reader's?
8. Have you used words you would use if you were speaking to the reader?

When you have put yourself in the reader's shoes and considered your message carefully, you may decide to reword certain parts. You may find it necessary to lighten up your sentences. You may restructure it so everything flows more logically from one idea to the next. Bravo! This will help your reader, and it will also help you to get a better response!

## TOUCH UP YOUR EMAIL TONE

**Have you ever read an email and felt as though you've been slapped in the face?** *That's what happens when the writer hasn't put the words together well, so the message comes across harsh, abrupt, condescending, patronising or maybe sarcastic. This will never achieve the right response, and will ultimately damage relationships.*

You alter your tone of voice to convey messages differently. Much of what you say is also interpreted through non-verbal clues – eye contact, gestures, inflections of the voice, etc. This type of 'reading between the lines' is not possible with the written word.

Consider the way these expressions come across, and study the better options:

- ✗ We cannot do anything about your problem. Try calling a plumber. (abrupt)
- ✓ I'm sorry we cannot help you. A plumber would be the best person to fix this.
  
- ✗ This problem wouldn't have happened if you'd connected the wires properly in the first place. (condescending)
- ✓ You may resolve this problem by connecting the wires as illustrated the manual.
  
- ✗ I am writing to complain because I was very unhappy with the way your staff treated me in your store today. (blunt)
- ✓ I was very disappointed with the standard of service I received in your store today.
  
- ✗ You are invited to attend an interview on Wednesday, 28 August at 1400 hours. (unfeeling and blunt, also passive)
- ✓ I hope you can attend an interview on Wednesday, 28 August at 1400.

### REMEMBER!



Using the wrong tone could cause real offence to your reader, and could lose you an important business contact – or friend.

Never ignore the need to use an appropriate tone, or your message could sound aggressive, blunt, rude, sarcastic, condescending or even offensive.

When writing in business, always consider these four important factors and adopt an appropriate tone that reflects them all:

- your status
- the reader's status
- your relationship with the reader
- the content of the message

## PUNCTUATE PROPERLY PLEASE!

**Many people ask me,** *“Does it really matter if you put your commas and full stops in the wrong place? Surely people will be able to figure out the message anyway?”*

Incorrect punctuation not only changes the meaning of your writing, but it can also cause your reader to lose focus on what you are saying. Instead, the reader will start thinking about how you are saying it and why it sounds odd to them. They won't get your meaning, and they may not reply to your key points. So yes, punctuation matters! Here are some of the key uses for the comma:

**Use a comma between two complete thoughts (i.e. full sentences) that are connected by a coordinating conjunction like *and, but, or, yet, for, and so*.**

- The email was sent on Monday, but John did not receive it until Thursday.
- The expansion of our business is a long-term project, and we need an effective management consultant to advise us.
- Becky has submitted her resignation, so she will be leaving at the end of the month.

**Use a comma after introductory phrases.**

- After replacing the cartridge in the printer, please close the door firmly.
- As soon as we obtain additional revenue, we can buy new stock.
- If you want to pass all your exams, you will need to work hard.

**Use commas to separate items in a list.**

- The committee will comprise Sue, Kara, James and Lynn.
- We need to order more envelopes, paper and staples.

**Use a comma before and after information that could be placed in brackets.**

- The new employee, Mary, will start work on Monday.
- The new shopping mall, which opens on Monday, has 43 stores.
- We need John, and possibly Doreen as well, to help with this project.
- Mr. John Brown, our Training Manager, will interview you tomorrow.

**Finally, check out this sentence, which could be read in two ways.**

- Mary, my assistant, will call you soon.

In this example, Mary is 'my assistant'.

- Mary, my assistant will call you soon

Without the second comma, Mary is the person you are talking to.

## USE VERBS NOT NOUNS

**When writing, many people tend to express themselves more formally** *than they would if speaking. For example, you may chat to a colleague about a new award to recognise excellent service, but when you sit down to write an email you find yourself writing 'in recognition of excellent service'. Why is this?*

Nominalisations (that's what this style of writing is called) appear all over our writing. They make sentences longer, they make your writing less lively, less human, and more bureaucratic. Normalisations are very common, especially in the civil service. What happens is that instead of using a verb, e.g. to recognise, the writers uses the noun, recognition.

Let's look at some examples of how you can change some nominalisations into verbs:

the use of	to use
the clarification of	to clarify
the improvement of	to improve
the provision of	to provide
the adoption of	to adopt

Now let's put some examples into sentences:

- ✗ I will help you in the negotiation of a better salary.
- ✓ I will help you to negotiate a better salary.
- ✗ Introducing lunch talks ensured the motivation of staff.
- ✓ We motivated staff by introducing lunch talks.
- ✗ My new manager is helping me in the realisation of my career goals.
- ✓ My new manager is helping me to realise my career goals.
- ✗ In recognition of the necessity of better staff training, the company made a decision on the recruitment of a Training Director.
- ✓ The company recognised that it needed better staff training, so they decided to recruit a Training Director.
- ✗ We monitored the use of facilities through the documentation of attendance.
- ✓ We monitored how people used the facilities by documenting attendance.

### REMEMBER!



You can really improve your writing if you start changing nominalisations into verbs. You may not stop them all at first, but just being on the lookout for them and making changes will be very worthwhile.

## KISS MORE IN YOUR WRITING!

**Please be informed that these instructions should be disseminated** to all your staff at the earliest opportunity so they can also start utilising all the information provided to make improvements in their business writing skills.

Yes I'm having a laugh! Let me try that again:

*Please share these guidelines with your staff soon, so they can also improve their business writing skills.*

Business people today have many documents to read. They are way too busy to try to decipher long-winded sentences full of long words and redundant phrases. Readers will appreciate a message that is direct and straight to the point, while still being respectful and courteous.

### REMEMBER!



As you work on developing your writing skills, remember the KISS principle.

**K**keep

**I**t

**S**hort and

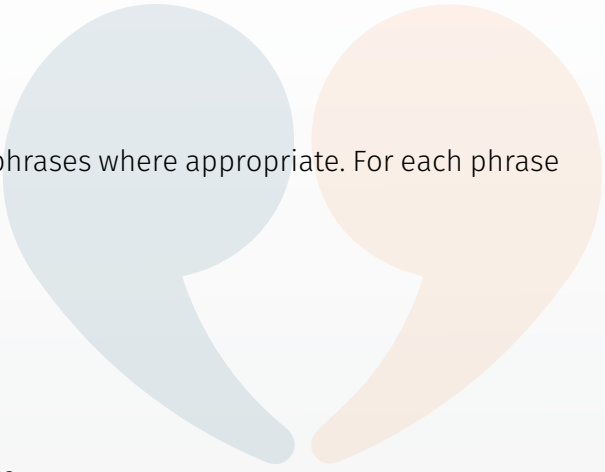
**S**imple

This means instead of long or complex words, use short ones. For each pair below, use the shorter simpler word (in bold):

commence	<b>start</b>	regarding	<b>about</b>
utilise	<b>use</b>	require	<b>need</b>
terminate	<b>end</b>	state	<b>say</b>
advise/inform	<b>tell</b>	visualise	<b>see</b>
assist	<b>help</b>	sufficient	<b>enough</b>
purchase	<b>buy</b>	dispatch	<b>send</b>
endeavour	<b>attempt/try</b>	kindly	<b>please</b>



KISS also means using one word instead of long phrases where appropriate. For each phrase here, use just one word (in bold) instead.



I should be glad if you would	<b>please</b>
In spite of the fact that	<b>despite</b>
With regard to	<b>about</b>
At the present moment in time	<b>now</b>
Conduct an investigation	<b>investigate</b>
In view of the fact that	<b>as/because</b>
In the event that	<b>if</b>
In the very near future	<b>soon</b>
At a later date	<b>later</b>
We would like to ask you to	<b>please</b>

**Avoid these phrases altogether:**

I have noticed that  
It has come to my attention that  
I am pleased to inform you that  
I am writing to let you know that  
I must inform you that  
Please be informed that  
Please be advised that  
Thanking you in anticipation  
Than you and regards  
Kindest regards

## SHOW YOUR SMILE IN EMAILS

**Dealing with clients should be easier over the telephone than through email** *because even without seeing the person you can hear them and their tone of voice. And, yes, you can hear a smile! In email you don't have any of these advantages, and you certainly can't tell when the writer is smiling. Or can you?*

With so many emails to write and time being of the essence, too many emails are purely transactions. They just aim to get the job done. The danger here is that messages written in stiff, wooden language containing pure facts will do little to create bonds or build relationships.

People who take time to put some thought and show some feelings in their emails will have ultimately greater success because they will build better relationships.

Here are some techniques you can use to let readers sense your smile.

### 1. Lead your reader into your message

Try not to just dive headlong into a message. Backtrack first, and give some basic background information. Be warm and friendly.

*Thanks for lunch last week. Your new project sounds fun.*

*It was good to chat today. Thanks for calling to clarify this issue.*

*Your news today is interesting. I am so pleased for you.*

### 2. Show some emotion

Some people give the mere facts and only the facts. No emotion, no feelings. Some emotive and sensory words can add texture and dimension to your message, and they will help to create a better bond.

*I'll be pleased to help you resolve this issue.*

*I'm happy to offer you an extra 5% discount in these circumstances.*

*I see what you mean, and can understand your concern.*

*I appreciate your help in trying to rectify this.*

### 3. Use visual language

Try to paint a picture of what you are communicating. The reader will then be able to see the image that you are trying to create.

*I see what you mean.*

*This is much clearer to me now.*

*Your suggestion looks good.*

## USE POSITIVE WORDS TO GET POSITIVE RESULTS

**Presenting yourself as an optimist is a well-proven strategy of success.** *This works in writing too.*

### Check out how the positive tone improves these sentences:

Negative: If you do not return your form before 2 August, it will be too late for you to attend the conference.

Positive: Please return your form before 2 August to register for this conference

Negative: We will not be able to supply you with the books unless your full delivery address is provided.

Positive: Please let us have your address so we can deliver the books.

Negative: Our shop closes at 10 pm every day and all day on Sunday.

Positive: Our shop opens from 10 am to 10 pm from Monday to Saturday

Negative: Purchases over \$1,000 cannot be approved by anyone else except the Sales Manager

Positive: The Sales Manager must approve purchases over \$1,000.

Negative: This model is very popular, but it only does 35 miles per gallon.

Positive: This model is very popular, and it does 35 miles per gallon.

### REMEMBER!



Using positive words and positive phrases will enhance the tone of your writing, as well as its effectiveness.

## ACHIEVE RESULTS FROM YOUR WRITING

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**Our ancestors believed it was important to use big words and flowery language** *to achieve their objective in writing. Some people still think this is true today!*

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Sadly, many people are still using long words, long sentences, passive voice and flowery writing that we would not use if we were speaking. In writing today, get your message across quickly and clearly, so that you achieve the right results just as quickly.

### REMEMBER!



Here are six steps to help you achieve the right results from your writing:

#### 1. Structure your documents logically

Follow my four-point plan: Make sure there is an introduction setting the scene, a central section stating all the details, and then draw it all together with an action section, and finally a simple close.

#### 2. Organise your points visually

Numbered points and bullets can be very helpful, and side heading can be useful when you have to include things like date/time/venue.

#### 3. Keep trim

Long sentences may be confusing. Keep sentences short, around 7-20 words.

#### 4. Give your reader a break

There is nothing worse than long paragraphs. Use a new paragraph for each separate issue of the main theme, with each paragraph about four to five lines long.

#### 5. Eradicate jargon

Avoid acronyms and specialist language unless you are sure it will be understood. Use simple words instead of long ones, and simple phrases instead of long sentences.

#### 6. Use familiar terms

If the reader doesn't understand the words you use, they will stop reading! Ditch the dinosaur language, and cut out commonly used clichés.

## SWITCH OFF THE POP-UP AND DODGE THE DING-DONG

**When I did some research about common complaints with email,** *most people told me they felt they couldn't escape email. It is constantly there, popping up in the corner of their screen, distracting them continuously, especially when working on an important project. Well, this may be a shock, but have you ever considered closing down your email program so you can focus?*

Most email programs have an alert facility that means we are interrupted regularly by a little bell or a beep, or just a pop-up appearing at the corner of our screens. If you're anything like me, these interruptions can interfere with your planned work and add frustration and stress to your workload.

Imagine how great it would be to concentrate on that important report – if only we could switch off our email for a while!

Consider this situation: you are focusing on an important report, really getting into it, on a roll, very happy with your work. Then out of the corner of your eye you see a pop-up alert telling you an email from a client has just arrive. You think, "Oh I'll just check it," and you scan it quickly. When you read it, you think, "I'll send a quick reply", but because you are rushing, you don't realise you've made errors, plus you haven't replied to all the points in your client's email.

The upshot is that there will be several more emails back and forth to clarify. It's the common 'ding-dong' that everyone knows so well – the ding-dong of emails going back and forth. If only you'd taken time to read the client's email more thoughtfully, and to consider your reply more carefully.

### REMEMBER!



I realise that some organisations insist that staff leave their alert on at all times. But unless it's a specific requirement of your job, please consider switching off your email alert – you will then be able to focus on your report or that important spreadsheet, and you will feel a greater sense of achievement by doing so.

After you have finished whatever you're working on, go back to your email and give every message your complete attention. This way, you can dodge the ding-dong!

## USE LISTS AND BULLETS

**I was writing an email yesterday when I thought to myself, “Hang on, Shirley, I’ve just written one point, and I know I have another one, and possibly more.” I then went back to reformat my paragraph into a list of bullets. This made such a big improvement to a simple email. It simplified my writing process, and it made it easier for the reader too.**

Which one of these examples is easier to read?

1. We would like the workshop to cover the nature of conflict, managing customers’ expectations as well as dealing with difficult situations and repairing relationships with customers.
2. We would like the workshop to cover:
  - Understanding the nature of conflict
  - Managing customers’ expectations
  - Dealing with difficult situations
  - Repairing relationships with customers

I think you’ll agree that number 2 was much easier to read here, yes?

Bulleted and numbered lists are great for many reasons. They help you to:

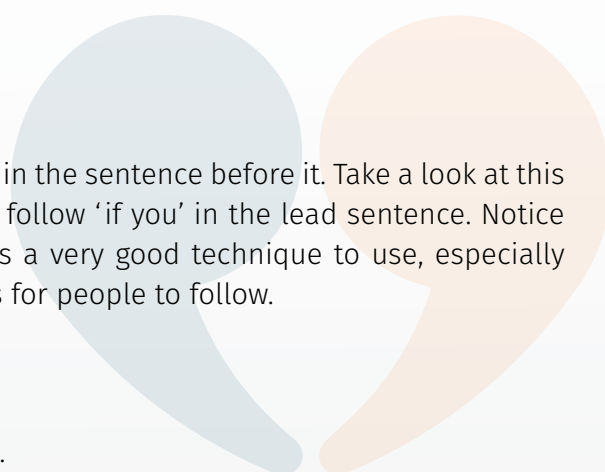
- Organise your thoughts and points.
- Focus your reader’s attention on key points.
- Condense detailed or complicated topics.
- Simplify the skimming process for busy readers.
- Enhance visual appeal.

Check out the list here. Did I prove my point?

### REMEMBER!



When writing list items, always make sure they are parallel in structure. For example, in the list above it would not have been correct to put, for the third bullet, ‘condensing detailed or complicated topics’. All the other bullets begin with verbs, so starting this point differently would have been inconsistent.



Make sure your list items follow whatever it says in the sentence before it. Take a look at this example, where every point in the list needs to follow 'if you' in the lead sentence. Notice how each point here begins with a verb. This is a very good technique to use, especially when writing a list of procedures or instructions for people to follow.

For example:

You can improve your business writing if you:

- Adopt a friendly, conversational writing style.
- Read your message out loud to check the tone.
- Keep to the point and stay focused.
- Organise your points logically.
- Use language that your reader will understand.

Here's another list of bullet points, this time written in a different style, but still remembering grammatical parallelism:

Job responsibilities include:

- Reception duties
- Coordinating travel arrangements
- Dealing with travel claims
- Maintaining databases
- Preparing catalogues and presentation materials
- General office duties

## **DANGER!**



Beware writing a list of points that don't follow the rule of grammatical parallelism. This could confuse your reader. If you start one point with a verb, make sure you start all points with a verb.

## KEEP ACTIVE, IN EMAIL TOO!

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**Poor writing damages reputations.** *Poor writing reflects badly on you and your organisation. As a result, business efficiency is lost as are opportunities to connect and build relationships with clients, colleagues and collaborators. Using active voice can considerably improve your writing and therefore your relationships.*

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Our ancestors used passive voice because they didn't want to show responsibility. They used passive voice to put a distance between the writer and the reader, and to keep a formality. The long-winded style of writing, with many redundant phrases, also slowed down understanding.

Let's face it though, in those days, our great-grandfathers had much more time to study documents and figure out what the reader was meaning. We don't have much time for that today! Check out these comparisons:

**Passive:** Arrangements have been made for a repeat order to be despatched to you immediately.

**Active:** I have arranged for a repeat order to be sent to you today.

**Passive:** The cause of your complaint has been investigated.

**Active:** I have looked into this issue.

**Passive:** The meeting will be chaired by Mark Robinson.

**Active:** Mark Robinson will chair the meeting.

### REMEMBER!



In today's writing, we should be using active voice, which is more alive, more focused, more personalised and much more interesting and clear.

Active voice is crisp, clear, transparent and easy to understand, with its focus on active verbs. The personal context makes it more positive and interesting.

Business today is conducted in a very informal way. In meetings and phone calls we use a natural, relaxed friendly language. We use active voice to get to the point quicker, but we still take care to be tactful. The language used in our writing today should also be simple, courteous, relaxed and straightforward, quite conversational.



## SAVE, DELETE, FORWARD OR ACT?

**Some people find the volume of mail in their inbox quite overwhelming.** *If it hasn't happened to you yet, watch out. It can happen overnight.*

If you leave a message in your inbox with no evaluation at all, it simply means that you will go back to read it again and again. This is just the same as moving pieces of paper around your desk from one tray to another. It's total waste of time.

### REMEMBER!



When processing messages, scan each one carefully. Read the subject line and the first paragraph. If necessary, scan a little more. Then make a decision about which of these four things you will do:

#### 1. Save or print it for reading later

These messages may be lower priority, for reading only, or messages that don't need immediate attention. File these messages somewhere you can find them later. Don't leave them in your inbox to be revisited several times.

#### 2. Delete it

We all receive irrelevant messages or junk. Just like you do with paper junk mail. Just bin it! Don't waste time thinking about it.

#### 3. Forward it to someone else

If someone else should deal with the message, forward it to them. But do include a simple note to explain why are you sending it on.

#### 4. Act on it

Many messages need a straightforward response. If you reply immediately, It's done. If you need to give it some thought, put it in your drafts folder first, or highlight the message with a priority setting.

## KEEP IT SIMPLE, BUT NOT TOO SIMPLE

**So many people today are using misspellings** for words, like *de* (*the*), *dat* (*that*), *dis* (*this*), *wud* (*would*), *tot* (*thought*), *frens* (*friends*), *dun* (*don't*) and even *witchew* (*with you*). If you must do this, please keep it to texting or instant messaging friends. However, it's not a good idea to get into the habit of using these non-words, because you may forget to spell out the words correctly when you really should.

A friend told me recently that she received a business email message written almost entirely in text language. When she replied, she told the writer that he hadn't come across very positively in his email message because it was too casual. The writer wrote back immediately in more appropriate language, and he thanked my friend very much for mentioning this. The writer had just chosen the wrong way of speaking (or writing) to my friend initially. The key is knowing when to use abbreviations and when not to.

### REMEMBER!



Watch your language. When you post something on Facebook or when you send an email, your writing is going out to a much wider audience. Abbreviations such as those mentioned earlier will not give a good impression of you. In fact, they will have the opposite effect. Especially if being viewed by potential employers.

It's really important that you learn to adapt your communication style depending on who you are talking to, otherwise you could end up in big trouble.

## EARN TRUST AND CONFIDENCE WITH GREAT WRITING

**When you are talking to someone face-to-face,** *you have lots of visual cues to help you - your tone of voice, gestures, movement, eye-contact. It may not be fair, but in the everyday world we are judged and influenced by all these criteria and more - even our occupation, height, dress and the way we look. Believe it or not, it is through the way we speak and look that we earn trust and confidence.*

With none of these visual cues present in our written communication, how do we earn trust and confidence when we write letters and emails?

In written communication, especially email, without the support of body language and other visual cues, we have to find other ways to evaluate the person who is 'speaking'. So how do we do that? We do that by looking at *\*style\**.

Style in written communications does not mean wearing a designer suit to do all your most important writing. Style means attention to proper spelling and punctuation, proper sentence construction instead of non-sentences, full spellings instead of abbreviations (especially things like r and u, which should only be used in text messages), use of visually attractive formatting (paragraphs, numbered points, bullets), consideration of appropriate tone and logical organisation.

If you learn to pay attention to all these aspects of style, you will increase the value of what you write, earn the respect of your readers, and you will have a distinct advantage in today's e-world.

When I was doing some research for my new book, *Model Business Letters, Emails and Other Business Documents 7th edition*, one of my friends said:

"When I receive a message full of mistakes, sloppy writing, bad punctuation and poor formatting, I think the writer has no respect for me - because he or she couldn't take just one minute to tidy it up before hitting 'send'."

### REMEMBER



If you want to earn the respect as well as the trust and confidence of your readers, you must learn how to write well, and make a conscious effort to improve your writing skills constantly.

You are what you write, so please learn to write well!

## LEARN THE NEW RULES OF BUSINESS WRITING

**Take a look around your workplace.** *Do the leaders in your organisation write effectively and powerfully? Do good writers tend to get promoted? Do people tend to listen to good writers? Are good writers able to persuade or convince effectively? Absolutely, the answer to all these questions is yes!*

We are writing so much more these days, and we depend upon on our writing skills to influence, persuade, encourage, collaborate, and to lead. However, it's rare to hear people talking about the importance of good writing in our day-to-day work. Most people don't really notice the quality of the writing they read – they simply react positively, negatively, or not at all.

If you have ever wondered if there's a better way to write your messages so they get better results, there is!

### REMEMBER!



Here are three of the new rules for written communication:

#### 1. If you can say it, you can write it

We connect with the world today largely through email, websites, blogs, texting, and social media. With all these channels we have only bare facts, without tone of voice, facial expressions, body language, or pauses. As we regularly use these means instead of talking, it makes sense to use writing that's as close as possible to spoken language.

When you do this, you gain yourself a great advantage – you put your personality and individuality into your message. This will help you to stand out more and make a greater connection with your reader.

#### 2. Write for today, not yesterday

Yesterday's writing is passive and wordy, it sounds really dull, and it puts a distance between you and the reader. The way it is written also slows down understanding. Today's writing sounds more conversational. It's crisp, clear, and transparent and the personal context makes it more positive and interesting.

##### **Yesterday:**

Please be advised that a meeting of the Annual Convention Committee will be held on 24 February (Thursday) at 9.30 am. Kindly advise me of your availability at your soonest.

##### **Today:**

I'd like to hold another meeting of the Annual Convention Committee on Tuesday 24 February from 9.30 to 11.30 am. Please confirm if you can join us.



### 3. Aim to build relationships

In today's fast-paced, communication-crazy world, it's essential to come across as a human being. If you insist on using old-fashioned or redundant jargon (*Please be reminded, Kindly be advised, Please find attached herewith, above-mentioned, reference and perusal etc*) you will obscure the real meaning and will not be adding any personality of your own.

Make your writing positive, stimulating and interesting, add some feeling and a personal touch. This will help people get to know the real person behind the message.

## 22 TONE AFFECTS YOUR IMAGE

**Tone can play such an important part in how our audience processes our message,** *but we often don't pay attention to it when we write. In our speech, we use tone quite easily, but it's harder to see or read tone in our writing.*

Tone is basically your attitude. It involves your attitude toward the subject, the message, and your audience. Your tone could be everything from humorous to angry to adoring.

Tone and style are not the same. In fact, sometimes your intended tone can go head-to-head with your natural style. For example, a friend of mine has a natural style that is semi-formal and somewhat personal. That style can come across as less than serious. When she is writing a more formal, objective message, her style can make it seem that she has a humorous or relaxed attitude toward the subject. In truth, she's quite serious about the subject, but her natural style might suggest she isn't.

### REMEMBER!



In all business communication you do need to pay attention to tone. When you write a letter or an email, always read it over at least once out loud. Imagine you're speaking to the reader. If something doesn't sound right, change it.

## USE THE RIGHT TONE TO GET THE RIGHT RESULTS

**In a conversation**, on the phone or face to face, you can gauge the reader's immediate reaction and change your tone accordingly. But once you've committed words to paper, you won't have a chance to do this. So it's doubly important to choose the right tone in your written messages.

**Tone refers** to the style or manner of expression you use, in your speech or writing. Just like in a conversation, the tone you use in your writing affects the way a reader interprets and responds to your message.

The tone you choose in your writing should be guided by who you want to read the material, why you want them to read it, and what reaction you hope to get.

In all business writing, you should strive for an overall tone that is confident, conversational, positive, and courteous.

**Confident tone:** This conveys authority and helps assure the reader your message is important enough to warrant attention.

**Conversational tone:** It's much better to use a more conversational tone today rather than the stilted, highly formal wording from the past. Write in a natural style, similar to how you speak. Avoid formal language or dense jargon.

**Positive tone:** Always look for positive ways to put across a message wherever possible, with the focus on benefits and strengths.

**Courteous tone:** Aim to be polite and respectful. Avoid lecturing the reader, or using language that suggests the reader is at fault or unreasonable. It's very important that what you write will not offend the reader.

### REMEMBER!



**Instinctively, most** people adjust the way they speak depending on their relationships with those they are addressing.

**It's important** to do this in your business writing too.

## USE THE 4Rs AND YOU'LL GET GREAT RESULTS

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**How often do you finish writing a document,** *look at it, and then say: "That's terrific"? No? Then you need to work on the 4Rs.*

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"If you wish to persuade me, you must think my thoughts, feel my feelings, and use my words."

- Roman philosopher, Cicero

Much of our writing is trying to persuade readers about something, so it's so important to remember who you are talking to. We need to think like they think, feel like they feel, and use words they will understand and relate to.

These 4Rs will help you remember just why the reader is so important.

**Reader** You need to put yourself in the reader's shoes and ask yourself what words will your reader understand. Sometimes we assume readers will understand the same words as us, when they often don't. Use clear and concise language to help you develop great relationships.

**Response** Your job is to communicate your ideas accurately, and when you do this well, your reader will understand your message and this will guide him or her towards the second R, which is to get the right response.

**Reaction** When you consider the reader and using the right language, the reader will feel good about communicating with you, so our third R is reaction. The reaction you must aim for is to make a great impression.

**Results** When you work on the first 3Rs, you should automatically achieve the fourth, which is to get the right results, and that way you'll start building trust and confidence.



## USE PLAIN ENGLISH

**Plain English is writing that's simple and clear.** *It's written with the reader in mind, using the right tone. Plain English helps you get your message across effectively. Plain English helps you get the right results.*

The purpose of business writing is to take care of business, and that means get things done. When we write at work, we often report on problems and their solutions, we need to update managers on projects deadlines, give information and updates, or ask for information.

All writers can help to get things done by keeping their language simple, easy to read and easy to understand. One great way of doing this is to use one simple verb - or action - wherever possible.

Take a look at these examples:

### Instead of

The chairman came to a conclusion

We need to make an improvement

Please help me to sign

We assist to forward it to them.

The committee will undertake an investigation

We will proceed to make the arrangements

### Write

The chairman concluded

We need to improve

Please sign

We will forward it to them.

The committee will investigate

We will make the arrangements

### Advantages of Plain English

- It's faster to write, and it's faster to read.
- It's easier to understand.
- It's straight to the point, but it's also courteous.
- It's much more simple.

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