

Smart Writing!

Presented by

SwanShadow
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Improve Your Business Letters

Intimidated by business correspondence? *Don't be!* Here are **five simple tips** you can put into practice **today** to immediately improve your letter writing skills.

1. Know what you want to say.

Sounds obvious, right? But if you aren't sure what your point is, your reader won't get it either.

Before you begin writing, list the key messages you want to cover. (Don't worry about style or format here.)

When your list is complete, read it through. *Did you miss anything?* Add it now. *Does your list include too many items?* Cross off the

non-essentials. (You can always write another letter.)

2. Know your reader.

Remember, you're not the audience. **Who** is the person to whom you're writing? What does she **already** know? What will he **want to know** by the end of your letter? Will she **understand** your message?

The more you know about your reader, and the more you view your letter from his perspective, the more effective your communication will be.

3. Use your own voice.

Write the way you speak. Don't use an awkward,

formal style just because it's a business letter. Be polite. Be professional. But be yourself.

4. Tighten it up.

If your letter runs longer than a single page, look for ways to make it shorter. Descriptive words (adjectives and adverbs) can often be omitted. Delete clichéd phrases. Don't use ten words if five will do.

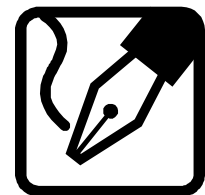
5. Sit on it!

Not literally, of course. But after you've written a letter, put it away for a day. Then read it again. With fresh eyes, you'll be amazed at what you'll see (and want to correct).

— Michael Rankins

Is That Write?

- One of English literature's most famous sentences contains only one word longer than four letters: **"To be or not to be: that is the question."**
- **Samuel Clemens**, the great American humorist better known as **Mark Twain**, did much of his writing in bed.
- Remember **typewriters**? Remington and Sons manufactured the first production model in 1873.



Get Your Readers to Act

Now that I know that, what do I do?

Everything you write should compel the reader to ask that question. It's a common mistake to load the reader with information without making clear what he needs to do next.

Salespeople are drilled on this principle: **"Ask for the order!"** Writers sell, too, whether products, or services, or ideas. So writers also should **"ask for the order"** — tell the reader what action she should take based on the information presented.

Action statements should be clear and concise. Don't make the reader guess!

So the next time you write a letter, flier, or ad, don't forget to answer the question: *Now that I know that, what do I do?*

Got suggestions for an upcoming issue?

Send us an e-mail and tell us about it!

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Writers Say...

"Writing is easy. All you do is stare at a blank sheet of paper until drops of blood form on your forehead." — Gene Fowler

Why Most Web Site Content Doesn't Connect

The Internet is a terrific source of information. It's also the home of a lot of poor writing. Why?

Most artists aren't writers.

Due to the Internet's ability to deliver pictures with the click of a mouse, Web development is dominated by graphic artists. In this modern age of specialization, many artists have limited copywriting skills.

Simply put, Web sites are often written by people who haven't done much writing. When you visit a site riddled with misspelled words and grammatical errors, inexperience

is often the reason.

Writing for the Web is different from writing for print media.

For one thing, visual attention spans are different. A reader opening a newspaper or magazine expects to find plenty to read. But people view the Web much like they view television — with little focus.

There's a physical factor, too. It's easier on the eye to read from a printed page than from a monitor screen.

Web site content, then, requires a new approach. Text must catch attention quickly.

It should be served up in smaller chunks, using short sentences, bulleted lists, and hypertext links. Many Web site authors haven't learned these techniques.

Anyone can do it.

Commercial books and magazines tend to be well-written. Why? Publishers are paying writers for the content. Editors have reviewed the copy and made needed changes. In short, it's a professional effort.

Almost anyone with a computer can create a Web site and write all the content. But that doesn't mean everyone should!

Here's how to make the writing on your Web site better.

1. **Realize "content is king."** No matter how dazzling your Web site design is, no one will buy if your copy doesn't sell.
2. **Don't just hire a Web designer.** Hire a skilled Web site writer too.
3. **Train your eye.** Learn the techniques that make for easier reading on the Web. Use them.
4. **Pay attention to details.** Typos and misspellings look unprofessional. *Clean them up!*