

Written Communication Skills

F From memos to letters and everything in between, your written communication skills tell a great deal about you. Make an effort to be neat as well as grammatically correct. And don't forget to use that spell check! In addition:

Be Specific. Just like a reporter, communicate the “who, what, where, why, when and how” of what needs to be done. Stay objective, unless you've been specifically instructed to use subjective language.

Avoid the Passive Voice. Instead of writing “The program was planned by Dane,” write, “Dane planned the program.” This makes it clearer and less awkward.

Be Concise. There's no need to be long-winded. Get to the point and steer clear of too much “fluff” in your writing. You'll lose readers if you spout off too long!

Get Things Right. Take great care when spelling people's names, getting their titles correct, and other specifics. And also make sure that you do a careful proof of your work. Spell check doesn't catch everything!



Attribute the Words of Others. If you're quoting someone, put quotes around their words and tell where you got the information. Don't take credit for words other than your own!

Know When Formal Language is Required. If you're writing an informal note to group members, it's fine to use contractions (“don't” instead of “do

Numbers

In formal writing, use the word for numbers one through nine. After that, you can use the actual number. Just don't start a sentence with any number—use the word instead.

not”) and some obvious terminology that they'll “get.” However, if you're writing for a more formal audience, like a proposal to the board of trustees or a budgeting committee, be more formal with your language. Don't use contractions, steer clear of slang, don't use abbreviations or symbols, and avoid clichés.

Don't Go “And” Crazy. When you're trying to cram a lot of information into what you're writing, it's easy to insert “and” many times. However, this makes for a real run-on sentence that is poor form and hard to read. So, if you have more than two “ands” in a sentence, consider turning that long sentence into two shorter ones.

Make Things Match. If you're referring to one person, then don't use “they” later on. Make your tenses match throughout your writing, instead of using “did” one time and then “does” the next. And your singular/plural references should jive, too.

Read It Out Loud. One very effective way to self-proof your work is to read it out loud. This will help you determine if you've used incorrect words, if your sentences run on too long, if your tenses don't match, and more.

Sources: www.mindtools.com/CommSkill/WritingSkills.htm, www.arc.sbc.edu/writingerrors.html

First Impressions

No matter what you're writing, a few things can create a negative first impression about your intelligence and your level of care: misspellings, grammatical mistakes, missed words, messy delivery, and incomplete work.

Helpful Resources

- ▲ Common Writing Errors, From the Academic Resource Center at Sweet Briar College (VA) • www.arc.sbc.edu/writingerrors.html
- ▲ Writing the Basic Business Letter, From Purdue University's (IN) Online Writing Lab • <http://owl.english.purdue.edu/owl/resource/653/01/>