

# ***BUSINESS WRITING: RAISE THE BAR and HELP YOUR COMPANY SUCCEED***

In every organization, more and more people are responsible for writing — business letters, proposals, Web sites, reports, customer communications and much more. But poor writing quality can undermine everything: marketing efforts, sales, efficiency, image.

This workshop shows communicators...

- ✓ How to demonstrate to management that good writing matters
- ✓ Options for leading the charge and raising the bar
- ✓ How to help people improve their writing (and sharpen your own)—a complete demonstration of practical ideas and fun activities to transform writing. Learn to communicate ...
  - An intuitive understanding of good writing ...
  - Contemporary guidelines for reaching audiences ...
  - A step-by-strategy that improves the thinking behind effective writing ...
  - Edit-yourself techniques (grammar-free!) ...and a grab-bag of useful tools, shortcuts and tricks.

## **Presenters:**

**Natalie Canavor & Claire Meirowitz**

<http://c-mbizwriting.com>

**IABC HERITAGE REGION CONFERENCE**

**Hartford, Connecticut**

**October 13, 2008**

# **HOW TO WRITE SUCCESSFULLY**

**Here is a process that works for just about every kind of writing.**

1. **Articulate:** What do I want to accomplish, exactly? My desired outcome?
2. **Who am I writing to?** What do I know about that person or group? And what's my relationship to that audience? *Try visualizing the person(s).*
3. **What tone** is appropriate? What medium and format, if there's a choice?
4. **What information** supports my purpose? Data, ideas, facts, examples, anecdotes, etc. *This is your content.*
5. **How should I start?** *The lead* is critical and should instantly let the reader know why the memo was written and why he/she should read it. *Usually it's best to put the bottom line on top.*
6. **Follow through** and write *the middle*, based on the content you determined in step 4 and using a logical order. Write a strong clear *ending* which makes the call to action crystal clear or summarizes as appropriate.
7. **Review** what you've done and build in sentence variety and logical connections—good transitions to make it all hang together
8. **Now read it through** and evaluate the big picture: What's coming across? Missing? Not needed? Does the structure work? Is the logic clear?
9. **Finally, do the nitty-gritty editing:** Correct—fix—tighten—cut—sharpen—double-check your facts. Clean up the structure and grammar and liven your language where you can. Try for strong, active verbs: in general, modifiers (adjectives and adverbs) weaken your thought and distract the reader.
10. **If there's a bottom line**, evaluate results—e.g., did the proposal get you the job? Did the letter or memo or e-mail elicit the response you wanted? If there's a "next time," work at your writing and evaluate the results again. It's like a resume: When you get it right, the phone rings.

## ***TWO TRICKS:***

1. Read it aloud to spot the awkward places. Good writing is say-able.
2. Get a writing buddy to give you feedback.

## ***REMEMBER: LESS IS BETTER AND SHORT IS BETTER.***

Research studies prove that to communicate best...

Sentences: Should average 14 words or less

Average paragraph: Should be no more than 42 words, 3-4 sentences each

Words: One and two syllable words work best

**C&M Business Writing Workshops**  
**<http://c-mbizwriting.com>**

# **CHOOSE SHORT, ACTIVE, READER-FRIENDLY WORDS**

*A short word works better than a long “stately” one, whatever your purpose.*

*Use one word rather than many whenever you can.*

<u>INSTEAD OF.....</u>	<u>TRY...</u>	<u>INSTEAD OF...</u>	<u>TRY...</u>
frequently	often	in order to	to
majority	most	of the opinion	think
initial	first	by means of	by
subsequent	future, later	despite the fact that	although
personnel	people, staff	a large number of	many
initiate	start	in as much as	because
fundamental	basic	during the course of	during
individuals	people	in most cases	usually
approximately	about	at all times	always
additional	more	on a daily basis	daily
constructed	built	as a general rule	generally
utilize	use	at this point in time	now
provide	give	free of charge	free
operate	run	along the lines of	like
communicate	say, write, tell	arrived at a decision	decided

## **BUT, WHEN YOU’RE WRITING ARTICLES, NEWSLETTERS, MARKETING MATERIALS AND BROCHURES, TAKE THE TIME TO FIND LIVELY, GRAPHIC WORDS**

*Sparking* a conversation may be better than *starting* one  
*Sprinted*, or *meandered*, or *galloped* may be better than *walked*  
*Hunched over the table* may be better than *sat at the table*  
*Launch a program* may be better than *start a program*  
*Hovered over* may be better than *watched closely*

*Collect your own vivid words and pepper your prose with them—carefully.*

## **CLUES THAT YOU NEED TO SAY IT BETTER:**

Eagle-eye your writing for signs that you’ve fallen into the passive:  
Question sentences that include *been*, *being*, *be*, *were*, *was*, *am*, *are*, *is*, *has been*.

Watch for words that end in *-ing*, *-ion* and *-ed*. Often, using such words mean your sentence construction, as well as word choice, needs rethinking.

# THE TROUBLE WITH JARGON IS ...

**It's a shortcut, and it's wrong to assume everyone understands what we mean.**

**It's a shield for not thinking things through to say what we really mean.**

**Our audiences don't "hear" it.**

**Overused buzzwords become meaningless.**

**It starts as insider lingo and ends obscuring our meaning to other audiences.**

**It puts words into "me" terms rather than "you" terms, which distances us from our readers and listeners. For example, a teacher who discusses "curriculum" with parents is saying, "I teach these subjects and you don't. Therefore, I'm the expert."**

## GRANT JARGON

dialogue with  
outreached or outreaching to  
incentivizing and de-incentivize  
benchmarking  
comprehensive  
capacity  
empowerment  
proactive  
technical assistance  
intensive  
impacts (as verb)  
turnkey

## EDUCATION JARGON

curriculum  
students  
continuum  
interdisciplinary  
articulation  
competency-based  
assessment-driven  
child-centered  
developmentally appropriate  
higher-order thinking  
student-centered  
critical thinking  
phonics  
staff development  
outcome-based  
mastery learning  
paradigm  
at-risk

## BUSINESS JARGON

actionable  
at the end of the day  
core competencies  
deliverables  
dialogue (as verb)  
functionality  
gain traction  
leapfrog  
leverage  
mission-critical  
modularize  
world class  
seamless  
operationalize  
proactive  
ramp up  
real-time  
repurpose (as verb)  
roll out  
scalable  
turnkey solutions

## LIBRARY JARGON

eclectic patronage  
multifaceted resource center  
organic interactive activities

## TECHNOLOGY JARGON

time to market  
best in class  
best practices  
stringent benchmarks

high-end  
robust  
scalable  
streamline  
user-oriented  
point in time  
final outcome  
general consensus  
new innovation  
change agent  
institutional core mission  
transformation  
business/value proposition  
key stakeholders  
higher-order questioning  
dialogue asynchronously  
results-oriented metrics  
turnkey solutions

## POLITICAL JARGON

nimby  
persuadables  
soft money  
NASCAR dads  
security Moms  
neoconservative  
paleoconservative  
apparachik  
strategic ambiguity  
reality based community  
transitional progressives  
margin of error  
constitutionalist

# **RESOURCES FOR IMPROVED WRITING**

Corporate communicators can choose from a variety of other style guides, dictionaries, thesauri and usage guides, some of which are available both in print and online.

## **Is Everyone on the Same Page?**

The most important step you can take is to ensure that everyone who writes in your organization is consistent. If the marketing department uses the *Merriam-Webster Collegiate Dictionary* and the customer-service department prefers the *American Heritage Dictionary*, your company's written materials may well differ.

Don't rely on the spelling checker of your word processing program, because there's often no consistency and no way to know why a change in spelling or usage is being suggested.

## **Start, and Continue, Your Own In-House Guide**

In addition to using published resources, your company should develop its own style sheets for terms and acronyms specific to your company or industry, and preferred word usages and style.

## ***Style Guides:***

**Recommended for general use:** *Gregg Reference Manual*, *The Associated Press Stylebook*, *The New York Times Manual of Style and Usage*, *The Chicago Manual of Style*, *Words into Type*, *U.S. Government Printing Office Style Manual* (GPO style).

**Recommended for specific fields:** *MLA* (Modern Language Assoc.) *Style Manual*, *AMA* (American Medical Association) *Manual of Style*, *CBE* (Council of Biology Editors) *Manual for Authors, Editors and Publishers*. Several other professions also have their own style guides.

## ***Dictionaries:***

**Most popular:** *Merriam-Webster's Collegiate*, *American Heritage College*, *Random House Webster's College*, *Webster's New World*.

## ***Thesauri:***

**Among others:** *Roget's International*, *Rodale's Synonym Finder*, *Random House Webster's College Thesaurus*, *Merriam-Webster's Dictionary of Synonyms*.

## ***Usage Guides:***

**The classics:** Wilson Follett's *Modern American Usage: A Guide*, Henry Fowler's *Dictionary of Modern English Usage*, Theodore Bernstein's *The Careful Writer: A Modern Guide to English Usage*, and two personal favorites, the thin but powerful, *The Elements of Style* by William Strunk, Jr. and E.B. White, and William Zinsser's *On Writing Well*.

**Business writing:** *Plain Style: Techniques for Simple, Concise, Emphatic Business Writing*

**Grammar handbooks:** *The Elements of Grammar*, *The New Webster's Grammar Guide*, *The Oxford Companion to the English Language*, *The Handbook of Good English*.

## **ABOUT THE PRESENTERS**

**NATALIE CANAVOR** creates publications, videos and Web sites for companies and nonprofits and also writes features for the *New York Times*, *Newsday* and various business publications. She is a former national magazine editor, director of communications for a major educational agency, and author of a book on marketing.

**CLAIRE MEIROWITZ** manages projects and edits print, e-letters and Web materials for a nationwide client base, including *Forbes*, *The Wall Street Journal*, Cold Spring Harbor Laboratory, Ziff-Davis, United Business Media, IBM, HP and Microsoft. Claire directed publications and community relations for SUNY College at Old Westbury, where she oversaw production of 400-plus publications annually.

**TOGETHER**, Claire and Natalie write a column on writing and editing for IABC's online *CW Bulletin*, distributed internationally, and published an article on the state of corporate writing for *Communication World Magazine*. A book they are co-writing has been accepted for publication under the Financial Times imprint of Pearson. Its working title is: *Business Writing for the Digital Age: The Only Guide You'll Ever Need for Print & E-Media*.

Both Natalie and Claire are long-time members of the International Association of Business Communicators, and active in the Long Island chapter.

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