

Welcome to Basis Points! Each month, Basis Points provides you tips and techniques that we've gleaned from a variety of sources to help better your business life. This month's theme is "Business Writing". Few skills are as elusive yet as important to business success than the ability to write simply, smartly and persuasively.

The Four P's

Want to write with power, authority and confidence? Just keep in mind these "Four P's" and you'll be well on your way!

Purpose – Before you put pen-to-paper (or fingertips-to-keyboard), take a moment to figure out what you want your writing to accomplish. If you can't express this idea in a single sentence, chances are the document you write will lack focus and be less than compelling.

Passion – Good writing crackles with energy and packs a wallop. Don't be afraid to inject your writing with emotion. The way you write should reveal as much of how you feel as what you think.

Plain English – Bad writing is easy to spot: it's verbose, unclear, uses lots of complicated words and substitutes jargon for clarity. Your goal: be simple, be direct, get to the point... then stop.

Pride of Authorship – Writing is like woodworking: it's a craft in which the best practitioners never cease trying to make the finished product better. Even when faced with tight deadlines, skilled writers allow sufficient time to organize their thoughts, to choose their words with care and most importantly, to edit and improve their work.

Source: "Confident Writing Blog", Joanna Young

"Either write something worth reading or do something worth writing."

- Benjamin Franklin

The Little Book Turns 50



2009 marks the 50th anniversary of the publication of "The Elements of Style", a 72-page handbook of grammatical stylistic "dos and don'ts" that still serves as the pre-eminent guide to effective writing. The book is a testament to brevity, and its lessons resonate as powerfully today as they did 50 years ago. Our favorite admonitions:

- ▶ Use the active voice.
- ▶ Make every word tell.
- ▶ Prefer the standard to the offbeat.
- ▶ Don't let style impede substance.

If you don't have a copy of "The Elements of Style", buy it. It's the single best investment a serious writer can make.

Source: "The Elements of Style", William C. Strunk and E.B. White; Longman Publishing, 2008

Email Etiquette

When Samuel B. Morse sent the first telegraph message ("What hath God wrought!") 165 years ago, he couldn't possibly have imagined the day would come when documents, communiqués and images flew at the speed of light to all corners of the Earth. Today, more than 100 billion emails crisscross the globe each day.

For most of us, emails have become the dominant mode of business communication. Indeed, one recent survey suggests that working professionals spend 40% of their day on activities related to email! To help you avoid the most common mistakes and misunderstandings when emailing others, here are five helpful hints.

- 1 **Look before sending** – Be sure to review your email one last time before pushing the "send" button. Don't send anything you don't want to send.
- 2 **Keep emails short** – The longer the email, the less likely it will be read. Be brief. Your readers will thank you.
- 3 **Make the subject precise** – To improve the likelihood of your email being opened, create a subject line that's descriptive and precise. Your intended audience should instantly know without ambiguity what your email is about.
- 4 **Don't dismiss style and punctuation** – The ease and speed with which emails can be developed can lull one into a false sense of 'casualness'. The last thing you want is an email that looks sloppy and unprofessional. Commas, periods and hyphens exist for a reason: they make it easier for readers to understand the intended meaning of a sentence.



Sources: "The 26 Most Important Rules of Email Etiquette", Heinz Tschabitscher (www.About.com)
Survey of Business Email Usage, The Radicati Group (www.radicati.com)

Stuffy vs. Straightforward

A 2005 study by Princeton University researchers revealed that writers who needlessly use technical language, jargon and long words are seen as less intelligent than those who stick with basic words and plain text. To keep your writing simple and direct, avoid the stuffy and stick to the straightforward.

<u>Stuffy</u>	<u>Straightforward</u>	<u>Stuffy</u>	<u>Straightforward</u>
due to the fact that	because	cognizant of	aware of
at the present time	now	commence	start
evident	clear	on the occasion of	when
in the event that	if	inasmuch as	because
subsequent to	after	precipitated	caused

Source: "10 Steps to Successful Business Writing", Jack E. Appleman; ASTD, 2008