



A Writer's Cheat Sheet: Secrets to Effective Communication

"The single biggest problem in communication is the illusion that it has taken place." — George Bernard Shaw

Let's face it: Most people avoid grammar lessons like copperheads and the Atlanta Beltline. And straying from elementary-school basics has been compounded by the age of social media, texting, and email. These media have re-invented writing and given us a free pass to skirt around rules of language.

Of course, no one expects you to be the next Flannery O'Connor, but poor writing reflects poorly on you and your hospital. If the first few words of a memo, letter, proposal, or presentation do not grab our attention, we skim—or skip—the rest. The key to effective communication is for people to want to read what you have to say. The following tips can help you tackle your next writing assignment powerfully and confidently.

Just the facts: Just because you know what you are talking about doesn't mean your reader will. Identify the basics: who, what, where, when, why, and how.

Grammar works: Mick Jagger can get away with "I can't get no satisfaction," but the rest of us mere mortals should stick with "I am satisfied with the outcome."



By James M. Ellington

Get active: Passive voice stifles a sentence's movement and authority. Rather than: "It has been decided that ..." try: "The board decided to ..."

Spelling bee: Obviously, typos can be costly. The recent 1,000-point dip on the stock market may have been caused by a single keystroke—or the fat-finger theory. Equally precarious is misspelling a person's name or organization. If nothing else, get people's names right. Imagine how Julia Louis-Dreyfus felt when her star on the Hollywood Walk of Fame read "Julia Luis Dreyfus."

Short and sweet: Write clearly and concisely. Say exactly what you want to say in as few words as possible. Sentences that drag on undermine your voice and fail to provide readers with the insight or information you intend. Further, use the correct words. If you aren't sure what a word means, either look it up or don't use it. And ditch any bureaucratic, jargon-riddled phrases or sentences.

Dress rehearsal: Write, then edit. Pruning your work can make the difference between the voice of a professional and the ramblings of a junior-high love letter. A good way to determine how your writing sounds is to read it aloud.

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