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Ten top tips for better business writing

Get noticed

Attract attention by summarising the key points of your message up front. You can do this using a benefit-led headline or subject heading, or an introductory paragraph that summarises the who, what, when, where, why and how of your message.

Keep it short

These days we're all overloaded with information. Your writing needs to cut through the communication chatter. Keep it brief. Use short, punchy sentences and paragraphs, and avoid filler words that add nothing.

Keep it simple

Communicate your message clearly using simple language and plain English. Avoid business speak, buzzwords and jargon. See the plain English cheat sheet provided.

Know your audience

It helps to have a good understanding of who you're writing for. Once you know your reader, thinking of your writing as a conversation with your audience will help you get the tone right.

Be professional, not formal

Business writing doesn't need to be formal or stuffy. Aim for a professional and informative tone to keep your audience engaged and interested.

WIIFM?

Focus your writing on the benefits to your audience – the "what's in it for me?". Engage your readers by talking about benefits, not features (remember, Canon don't sell cameras, they sell memories).

Include a call to action

Your communication should aim to inform, entertain or inspire action. Be clear about your goal: what action do you want your reader to take as a result? This could be signing up for email updates, investing in a new product or simply attending a meeting.

Check, check and check again

Don't undo your good work by spelling your boss's name wrong, or including the wrong date for your event. Check your language, spelling and punctuation. Get a colleague to read it, or hire a professional proofreader – a fresh pair of eyes will spot things you've overlooked. And never rely on your spellchecker as a substitute for proofreading.

Say it loud

When I finish any copywriting job there's one thing I do, without fail, before sending my work to the client – I read it out loud. Reading aloud makes it easier to identify repetition and inconsistency than reading on screen or in your head. I don't know why this works, I just know it does. Try it!

Sleep on it

If you have time in your schedule, review what you've written the following morning. It's amazing what you'll spot when you reread your document after some time away.