
WriteVoiceTM

Building Your Brand Voice Online and Off

Do Not Fear Mistakes. There are None. – *Miles Davis*

This WriteVoiceTM workshop was created expressly for **Cheetah Learning.**

Harvest

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Agenda – Where we will go

9:00-9:15	Welcome. Why we're here
9:15-9:30	Opening exercise: writers you admire
9:30-10:00	Writing for brand voice/discussion of the Cheetah brand
10:00-10:30	Lab 1 Rewriting sample copy in brand voice
10:30-10:45	Break
10:45-11:00	Lab 2 Grading the wall: what content do you think is effective?
11:00-11:30	Writer's pathway. Overview of writing process
11:30-12:00	Writing for the web
12:00-12:30	Lab 3 Writing intro copy for a product/service web page
12:30-1:30	Lunch break
1:30-2:00	Email that excels
2:00-2:30	Lab 4 Write a promotional email for a product/service
2:30-3:00	Think like a customer
3:00-3:15	Break
3:15-3:30	Grammar through the business lens
3:30-4:00	Lab 5 Grand finale
4:00-4:30	Tools to take away and Q&A

Introduction and foreword

Beyond lip service to business communication

In business, there's a lot of lip service paid to communication: corporate communication, internal communication, more effective communication and the list of artificial homage to communication goes on and on.

But, the truth is one core part of communication is rarely given the attention it deserves: writing. In a world of inflated buzzwords, long corporate descriptions ooze with technological words and jargon hoping to make a company, product or service sound more important.

In the midst of all this communication chaos, the word "writing" sounds too simple to be important.

That's why we're teaching this course. Writing has never been more important.

For marketers, there's never been more information to break through.

For consumers, there's never been more information to digest.

People are time-starved and they won't dig through your long, insular sentences to try to understand what you really mean.

You can write clear, concise, creative communications that will make a difference for your business. This course is designed to give you practical tips and tools and share with you what we've learned in working with both the Fortune 500 and entrepreneurial ventures.

Most of all, we want to unveil any mystique around the art and science of writing and give you permission to enjoy it and do it well. It's hard work to write well, but there's accomplishment in every email, paragraph, and word that connects to your reader. Enjoy the journey as much as the destination.

Writing for a brand voice

“Stupid is as stupid does...”

Creating voice & tone

The smartest guy in the room.

Take a lesson from Forest Gump. If you're trying too hard to sound smart and sophisticated, you end up sounding just plain dumb. Think of meetings that you're in, when that one annoying person is waxing poetic, eating up time because he needs you to know that he's the smartest guy in the room. When arrogance comes through in writing, it's not authentic and it shuts the reader out. Authenticity is key to effective communication.

Wherefore art thou, my customer maximus?

The biggest favor you can do for yourself is to get comfortable with your own voice. Focus on sounding like yourself. If you're clear, your reader will understand you and your words will have impact. Simplify and let your voice rise to the surface, give the reader a reason to know you.

A word of caution: never write with anger or sarcasm.

The reader feels every grimace. Don't talk down or condescend to your audience.

Lay the brand voice down, once the message is clear.

Once you feel comfortable with your own voice and you've written down the messages you want to communicate, then think about the brand voice of the company. It's easier to go back and edit with the brand voice in mind, then to try to write in it. In our office, we call this “voicing” the document.

Branding begins with words.

The words that you use to communicate the essence of a brand are just as important as the images. When you're writing for a company, it's important to understand the corporate personality and the key attributes of the brand. The personality of a company creates the editorial voice, establishes the tone and drives the design and “look and feel” of communications.

Know the Cheetah voice.

The brand voice is an important part of any company's overall brand. When working on communication materials, the brand voice provides a touchstone that guides your writing for a particular company or product.

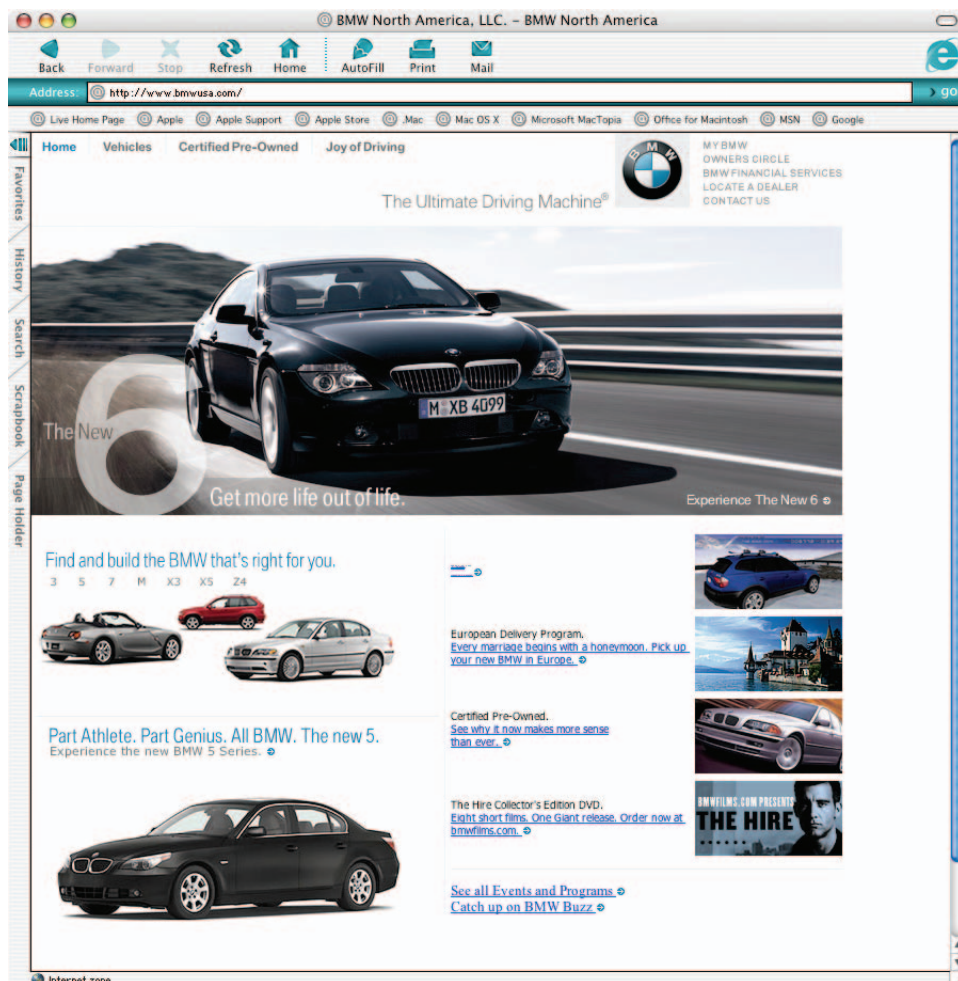
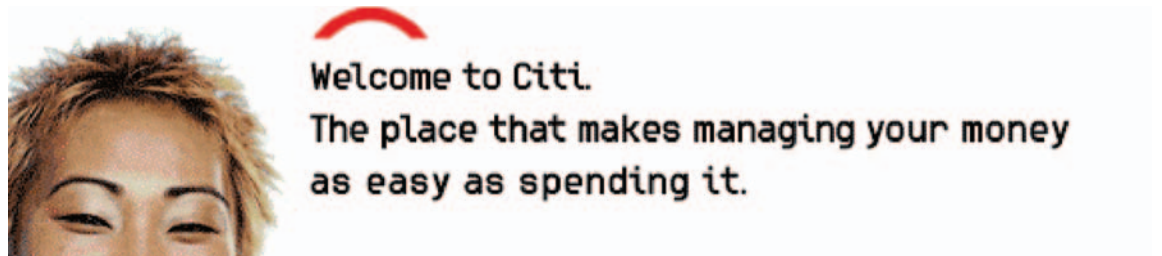
Staying true to the voice.

Before collateral is created, begin with an outline that includes headers and introductory paragraphs. Review the outline with the Cheetah voice in mind. Ask yourself: does this copy support our brand voice and personality?

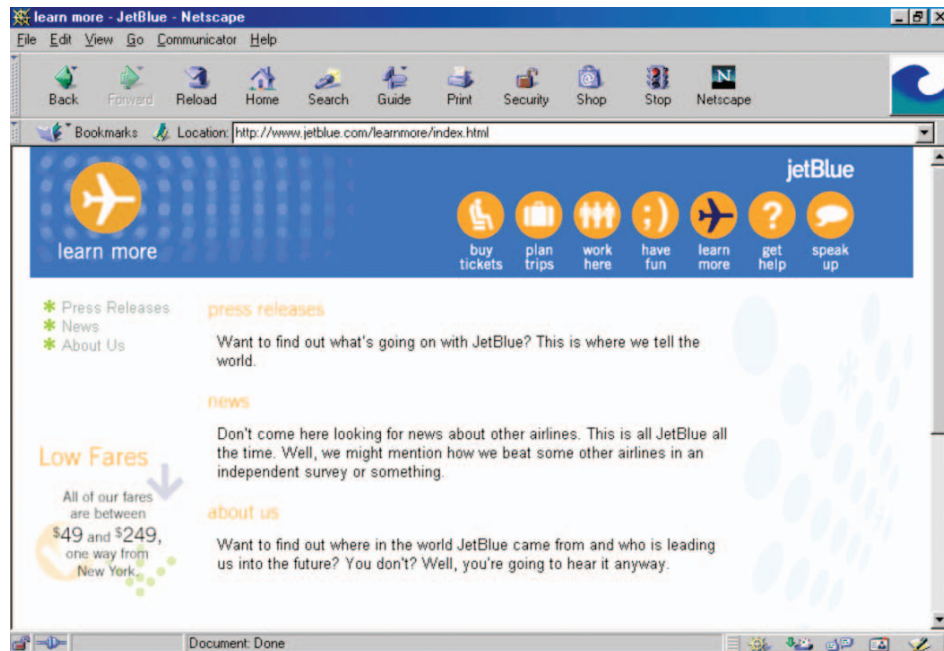
Start a voice file.

Keep examples that you like from any communication you receive. Great ideas come from unexpected places.

Voice best practices – Whose voice do you like?



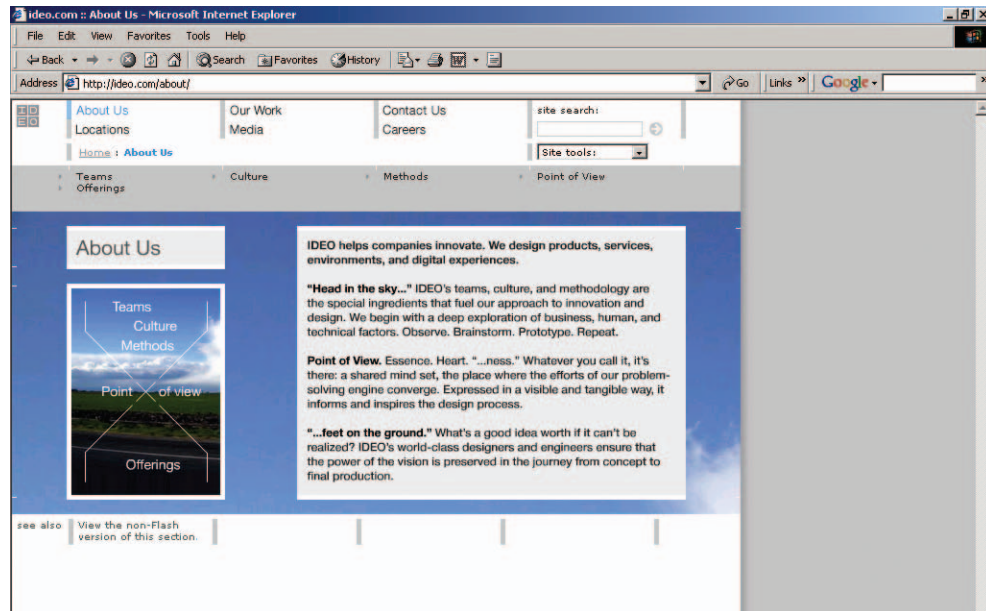
Voice best practices – Whose voice do you like? (continued)



Coach.com defines
Coach Style
with our new look.

The classics, reinterpreted styles, and the newest ideas. It's what you've come to expect from Coach. That's why we've given ourselves a completely new look. We've made shopping easier, too. As you explore Coach.com you'll find:

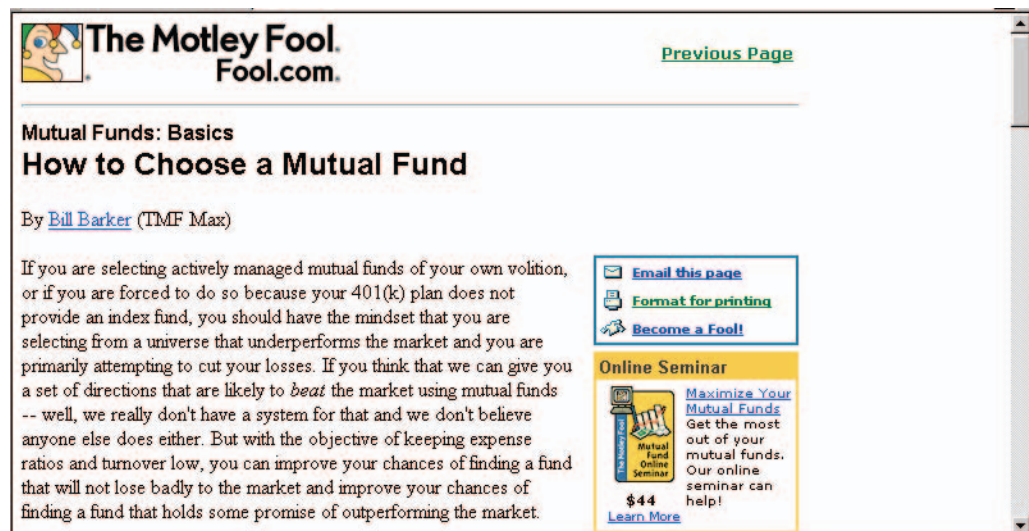
Voice best practices – Whose voice do you like? (continued)



Voice best practices – Whose voice do you like? (continued)



The screenshot shows the homepage of The Motley Fool website. The browser address bar displays the URL: <http://www.fool.com/specials.htm?ref=G02A02>. The page features a navigation bar with links to HOME, DISCUSSION BOARDS, QUOTES & DATA, STOCK RESEARCH, SHOP FOOLMART, MY PORTFOLIO, MY FOOL, LOGIN, and a search bar. Below the navigation bar, there are sections for "Special Features" and "Learn to use IBD FOOLISHLY". The "Special Features" section includes links to "Irrational Exuberance, One Year Later", "The Best of the Fool in Newsprint", "Five Things to Look for This Earnings Season", and "Socially Responsible Investing". The "Learn to use IBD FOOLISHLY" section promotes a free guide to the Investor's Business Daily.



The screenshot shows an article titled "Mutual Funds: Basics" and "How to Choose a Mutual Fund" by Bill Barker (TMF Max). The article text discusses the challenges of selecting actively managed mutual funds and the importance of understanding the market. The article is dated [Wed Apr 11]. To the right of the article text, there are links for "Email this page", "Format for printing", and "Become a Fool!". Below these links, there is a section for an "Online Seminar" titled "Maximize Your Mutual Funds" with a price of \$44 and a "Learn More" link.

The Cheetah brand voice

The Cheetah voice is the expression of the Cheetah brand in all communications – and all conversations and experiences.

It is irreverent and humorous, warm and confident, passionate and enthusiastic.

Core Attributes of the Cheetah Voice

Friendly and warm

Sincere and reliable

Irreverent and fun

Confident and knowledgeable

Passionate and enthusiastic

How to use the Cheetah brand personality in your writing

Friendly and warm

Use conversational language that connects to your customer. You should sound like a close friend who cares about the customer's needs. Avoid business jargon and terms that sound overly important or arrogant. Use anecdotes or metaphors that your customer can connect to. Take the Aunt Ethel test: would Aunt Ethel get it?

Sincere and reliable

Use well-structured sentences that follow a clear communications pathway. Make it easy for your customers to get their arms around the message. Demonstrate sincerity with proof points or Cheetah stories that illustrate your successes.

Irreverent and fun

Humor is always memorable. Just use your gut or that of a fellow Cheetah to make sure the humor clicks with the customer. It shouldn't be funny just for you. Fun can also be communicated with personal stories or quotes from your customers who have already earned their Cheetah spots.

Confident and knowledgeable

Use concise and vivid language that communicates competence and expertise in clear, authentic terms. Less is often more. Confidence does not mean endless blocks of prose.

Passionate and enthusiastic

Use active verbs and choose dynamic language that shows the power of the Cheetah experience and the momentum and speed of the customer's success.

The writer's pathway

If you're just skimming and you read nothing else, we're going to give you our top ten list of the basics. These are the things that you should have in your brain or by your computer when you're writing and editing. You should also have *The Elements of Style* by Strunk and White handy, so you can check rules of usage and grammar. It's a good idea to know the rules before you break them.

Top Ten Basics That Never Go Away

1. **Relax and write.** Write in a natural and appropriate voice that will connect to your audience.
2. **Simplicity is brilliance.** Don't try too hard to sound smart.
3. **Action, please.** Use the active voice and strong verbs.
4. **Clarity is the train you want to ride.** Be clear and concise.
5. **Use the delete key or red pen.** Remove needless words.
6. **Ease into your mental jeans.** Avoid business jargon and clichés.
7. **Be true to yourself and your readers.** Be objective and accurate.
8. **It isn't over 'til it's over.** Be prepared to revise and rewrite.
9. **Request permission to think.** Give yourself permission to get your thoughts on paper before you start editing them.
10. **Be a student for life.** Good writers are almost always great readers. Read as much as you can and learn from other writers that connect with you.

Breaking it down

Many people get overwhelmed at the thought of writing because they don't know where to begin. Many business writers use a creative brief to kick-start the creative process and get all parties on the same page. A brief can be tailored to any writing project. It's an excellent tool to help gather information and to establish expectations early in the creative process.

Here are the nine steps we follow in our business writing practice.

1. Collecting. Use your creative brief to get the lay of the land and fully understand your objectives. Once you're clear what you have to accomplish, gather as much pertinent info as you can quickly.

2. Immersion. Once you have all the information in front of you, you need to get your brain in the game. Digest as much as you can and give yourself the confidence you'll need to get the first draft in motion.

3. Focus. Now, you're inside the topic with loads of images swimming in your brain. Two important points to get back to before you write: 1) your audience and 2) what you need them to do with your information. Make sure you clearly understand who your audience is and how they're feeling. Are you writing up-beat and chirpy copy to a group of employees who have just been laid-off? Are you writing too formally for a newsletter that is read by the water cooler? When the tone is wrong for the audience, you're writing copy that fuels Scott Adams career and keeps Dilbert alive and well in corporate America. Once you know who they are, make sure you are clear about what you want them to do. Is there a call to action? Have you stressed the benefit and made the information relevant to them?

4. Editorial Concepts. If you have time, you may want to deliver editorial concepts prior to an outline or a draft. Editorial concepts can take the form of headlines or editorial concepts that show possible directions your copy could take.

5. Outline. Your outline shows the structure of your document. How are you setting up your story? What's the flow? What are the key messages covered in each area? It also gives you a chance to see where you need more information.

6. Draft. It's the first draft that helps you gather feedback and reduce the number of revisions.

7. Revisions. In business writing, count on at least two revisions and make sure you build time into your schedule for rewriting.

8. Packaging and Presentation. How should it be formatted? Find out how your manager is used to seeing copy. For example, some people have a hard time reading the copy until it's laid out with design.

9. Getting it There. Understand the requirements of whoever is receiving your copy. Format? Print specs? Ask!

Writing online: best practices for the web and email

OK, you've collected the key information that you need. You know your message, your audience and your brand voice. Now you're sitting and looking at a diagram of a web site and wondering where in the world to start.

First of all, take a deep breath and remind yourself: writing is writing. Whether it's a brochure, email or web content, the basic rules of how to create strong copy are the same.

Compelling copy beats the competition

You have a lot of competition: voice mail, email, cell phones, beepers, and the endless stream of people flowing in and out of your reader's office. Writing for the reader who's sitting at a computer screen offers its own set of challenges. Web usability guru Jakob Nielsen has found that only a third of a site's visitors read a whole article; instead, web readers look for headlines, summaries and captions – anything that makes the information easy to grab and digest.

So, here are a few rules to keep in mind when writing for the web and email.

Think one screen at a time

Because that's the way the reader sees it. Sure your Mom will scroll to infinity to read your glorious prose, but your customers, clients, coworkers and, yes, even your friends will tire very quickly. Web readers prefer "chunks" of copy. Blocks of information that require little or no scrolling. Allow for plenty of white space on the screen.

Write short, concise paragraphs

Reading on a computer screen is hard on the eyes. That's why it's unusual for people to read on the web – instead, they scan the pages looking for the key nuggets of information.

Keep paragraphs short, prioritize your messages and get to the point quickly. Don't forget the inverted pyramid. Your lead should summarize your story from the customer's point of view. Be sure to put the important information at the top, where it can be viewed, literally, without lifting a finger.

Use your heads and subheads

Heads and subheads are important, particularly in the web world where most people skim copy instead of settling into their Aeron™ for a long, leisurely read. Make your headline's and subheads work together to tell the story. Try a provocative leading headline as a hook with subheads that drive the benefits. Your headings should clarify or illuminate your copy. If a reader only skims the heads on your site, they should have a basic understanding of your key messages.

Writing online: best practices for the web and email (continued)

Bullets rule – but don't laundry list!

Bullets are a great way to break up paragraphs into those all-important “chunks” and to highlight key messages. We like to use bullets to highlight customer benefits.

Make it interactive, where it makes sense

One advantage the Internet gives you that print never can is that it makes your text interactive. Providing meaningful links to other sources makes your copy interesting and valuable. Make the links descriptive and clear, too. Don't test the patience of your readers by making them click on a link to find out what's there.

Let design and copy work together for the most impact

Whenever possible, work with a designer before you begin writing. Designers and writers conceptualizing together can make the final product even more powerful. For example, if you can provide a designer with headlines, the designer can then provide you with design directions that may help to guide your thinking as you write. It's also important to know what context your copy needs to fit into. If you're writing long paragraphs and the design calls for two sentence descriptors, there's a disconnect.

Emails that excel

According to Jupiter Communications, the average consumer receives 40 pieces of unsolicited commercial email per day. And by 2005, the total is likely to soar to 1,600.

So, how do you get your company's email to stand out? Done well, email is a compelling, effective way to touch the customer and your employees in highly customized, relevant way.

It may be virtual, but it's still formal correspondence

All email is not alike. Don't confuse the chatty little missives you and your friends trade during the day for business email. Email that is going out to customers or employees needs to be structured, respectful, interesting and benefit driven to be successful.

Emails that excel (continued)

Let's take it step by step, just like you did in fourth grade.

Anatomy of an email

Create a meaningful subject line

The subject line is probably your most important piece of real estate in an email message. REMEMBER: you want the recipient to open your message.

- > Make it customized and relevant
- > Beware of the cheesy hard-sell like “free” and “money back”
- > Don't be too familiar. (“Morris, worried about thinning hair?”)
- > Keep length between 26-34 characters

Salutation

Get my name right or don't use it. Think about your customer. Will they want you to call them by their first name?

- > Dear John, Ms. Smith, Valued Bank Customer

The message

Before sending an email ask yourself how the email will benefit your customer. Is your email filling a known need, did your customer ask to hear from you, will your customer receive information that will save them money on a product or service they use? Ask yourself: what do my customers want to hear about?

The body of the email

- > Use a powerful, benefit-driven header
- > Follow the inverted pyramid
- > Make it relevant and customized
- > Establish context
- > Create at-a-glance copy (remember those subheads!)
- > Make it easy for the reader to digest your offer and act on it.
- > Describe offer clearly.
- > Have a clear call to action
- > Offer a range of contact options (1-800 #, URL, email address(es), brick-and-mortar locations)
- > Emphasize (and bullet) benefits (not just offers)
- > Include prominent, clear opt-out function
- > Include prominent link to privacy policy

The message: tone and style

Have you ever analyzed how your email compares to your web site, your direct mail, your annual report, and your business cards? Do all of your communications speak the same language as far as tone and design? If they don't, you're diluting your brand message – not building it. Make certain all your communications are

- > Customer-focused
- > Action-oriented
- > Use the brand voice

Emails that excel (continued)

Your employees and colleagues are your customers, too. And with email being such a ubiquitous form of communication, you need to take a look at how your organization is using email to communicate with its internal audience.

Most employees like getting company information via email, provided a few simple rules are followed:

Remember the boy who cried wolf.

As with any internal communication, be judicious. Your employees will be far more inclined to open and read company emails if the ones they get contain useful and relevant information.

Don't waste their time.

The same rules that apply to sending emails to your customers are equally as important with your employees. Get to the point. Use descriptive subject lines and headings. Have a clear call to action and let them know how to reply or where to go for more information.

Get everyone on the same page.

Make sure there are company-wide rules for the use and distribution of email. If everyone's emails are structured and organized in a similar way, they'll be easier to read and more effective.

Don't use emails for critical information.

Important news should always be delivered face-to-face. Don't use email to talk about anything that is critical to the business, like a merger or an acquisition, or anything that could potentially impact salaries or jobs. Sensitive information needs face-to-face communication. Never hide behind email.

Email examples

What's Blue Have in Store for Spring Time?

Blue gives you a whole new attitude. The weather is getting warmer and Blue is making it easier for you to do things faster and smarter. Whether the blue sky makes you think of your future retirement or asking your boss about telecommuting, we have it covered. Check it out at www.americanexpress.com/igotblue.

Quick Picks

- > Get your financial picture in focus with Blue Tools
- > Pay your bills online
- > Hear the ins and outs of Telecommuting with an industry expert
- > Jump start tomorrow with an IRA
- > Register Blue and get the inside scoop on Online Extras

1. Focus In on Your Financial Future

Why wonder what the future will look like when you can get a handle on it today? Use Blue Tools to calculate cash flow, net worth or debt reduction. You can also map out your savings. Get the picture? Go see where you are and where you're going at www.americanexpress.com/igotblue.

2. Take Back Some Time and Pay Your Blue Bill Online.

Register today for American Express® Online Services and pay your bills and check your account online. You can also download statements for use with Quicken™ and MS Money™. When you can't sleep, it beats counting sheep. Go online at any hour to manage your finances at www.americanexpress.com/igotblue.

3. A Day in the Life of a Telecommuter

Chat it up about Telecommuting with your peers after you hear the low-down from an industry expert. Tune in on Tuesday, March 14th, 8pm EST and envision your life as one of the thousands of telecommuters. You don't have to commute to get to www.americanexpress.com/igotblue. Join us.

4. A Beach? A Snow Board? A Hot Tub? What Does Your Retirement Look Like?

It's never too early to envision your retirement. When you open an American Express IRA account, you can also qualify for FREE online stock trades. Planning for your future just keeps getting easier. What are you waiting for? Take a step closer to your golden years at www.americanexpress.com/igotblue.

5. Merchant Magic for Cardmembers Like You


We know it sounds too good to be true: special online values just for registering Blue and searching the Online Extras database. But, that's the deal. Visit (INSERT URL) and see what magic our merchants are sending your way.

In the future, if you do not wish to receive similar e-mail offers from American Express, just click the reply button and let us know by typing the word "REMOVE" in the subject line of your response. Our offer opt-out process is automated, so please direct all other inquiries to:
http://www.americanexpress.com/cust_serv

Please visit the American Express Privacy Statement at <http://americanexpress.com/corp/consumerinfo/privacy/privacystatement.asp> to set, review or change preferences regarding the type of email offers that you want to receive.

Email examples (continued)

Announcing a New D&B Affiliate Program!



Small Business
Solutions

Increase your revenue by partnering with a name people trust.

Dear Valued Customer,

D&B Small Business Solutions is delighted to announce the launch of our new **Affiliate Program!**

I am contacting you to invite you to learn more about participating in the D&B Small Business Solutions affiliate program. This free program gives you the tools to promote D&B Small Business Solutions to visitors of your site, and **earn commissions for your referrals!**

Act Now!

When you join the D&B Small Business Solutions affiliate program you will get access to banners and text links that offer a great introductory offer to visitors to your site - a FREE D&B Credit eValuator, PLUS 6 months of monitoring service **FREE!** That's a \$24.99 value - FREE to visitors of your site! The Credit eValuator Report offers an easy-to-read credit snapshot of any business, with up-to-date information and analysis.

Commission Structure:

As a member of the D&B Small Business Solutions affiliate program you'll earn a \$2 flat fee for new registrations completed on the D&B Small Business Solutions site as a result of clicking on a link that you placed on your site.

Once a visitor has registered with D&B Small Business Solutions and taken advantage of the offer, you will receive an additional \$10 flat fee for the visitor's first purchase of a D&B Small Business Solutions product within 90 days of clicking through from your site to ours (excludes purchases made using the free report promotion).

Learn more.

To learn more about the D&B Small Business Solutions affiliate program simply click on the following link: http://sbs.dnb.com/affiliate_home.asp.

We sincerely hope you will join our team and look forward to much success with you. Should you have any questions related to the D&B Small Business Solutions affiliate program, please do not hesitate to email affiliates@dnb.com.

Sincerely,

Julie McGill
D&B Small Business Solutions


Learn more

Put a D&B banner on your site... and every click could earn you cash!


Become a D&B affiliate today.

Learn more

Email examples (continued)



Let your household bills
Come To Us
instead.



**You've got
better things
to do with
your time.**

It's not just for your American Express bill. It's a comprehensive way to securely manage — online and in one place — every single bill you receive. And it's called the American Express® Bill Center. [Try it today](#) with our special offer for Platinum® Cardmembers only.

Even if you already pay your bills online, you'll be impressed by how many convenient features you'll get with the American Express Bill Center. And because it's from American Express, you know you can count on an uncompromising level of security.

View and pay all your bills online.
They get mailed directly to us, we scan them into a computer and show them to you online. Look at them anytime and in one place.

- **Set up bills you want to be paid automatically.** Just set the amount you want to pay each month and we'll handle it from there.
- **Use it to pay for services you don't get a bill for,** like the babysitter, the drycleaner, the mortgage and more.
- **Pay your bills on time with e-mail alerts.** Set them up to notify you when a bill has arrived, is due, and more.
- **Simplify record-keeping with a year-end CD-ROM.** Tax preparation can be much easier when you buy our optional CD-ROM of your year-end billing and payment history.

Best of all, the service is only \$8.95 per month with the first three months FEE-FREE for Platinum Cardmembers only.

Reclaim the time you spend paying bills. Learn more about this very special offer for Platinum Cardmembers only from the American Express Bill Center — or [try it FEE-FREE* for three months!](#)

[Try it today!](#) ►

* Terms and conditions apply. A monthly fee will be incurred after your first 3 months of service.

This e-mail was sent to you. If you received this e-mail at a different address, this e-mail message was forwarded. If you do not wish to receive future e-mail offers from American Express, please hit the reply button and let us know by typing the word "REMOVE" and indicate this e-mail address in the subject line.

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Creating email surveys

Recognize the importance of time and get to the point quickly.

Example

Whirlpool appreciates and values your time, insights and opinions. The following questions focus on your experiences in the kitchen: how you feel about food, cooking and the kitchen itself.

Setting time commitment expectations

If the survey can be completed in less than 10 minutes, specify the time. If it will be over ten minutes, don't specify the time and instead keep time references generic.

Let people know how their information will be used.

Example

All of your information will be kept confidential. It will be used to validate consumer insight and experiences surrounding the kitchen and the role it plays in our lives.

Thank people for their time.

Make it easy for them to respond to your questions.

- > Provide a link in the email to an easy to use, web form.
- > Attach a word document that they can easily return to you via email.
- > If there are only a few questions, you can place them in the body of the email with simple instructions.

Remember, if it seems too difficult or time-consuming, people will delete the email or ignore it.

Reminders

People's email boxes do get full and people travel, so build in time to send out reminders for important email surveys and communication. Reminders should stress the deadline without being overbearing. A one-line reminder on the deadline is sufficient. It angers people when they feel like they are regularly getting "email vents" from their colleagues.

Offer incentives

Incentives do wonders to bring email survey responses in. Dinner for two or coffee served by a senior level person for a week can be simple enough to drive responses.

Think like a customer

Where will your customers be when they read your communication?

How will they feel? Tired? Spent? Overworked? Info-tiqued?

Is there an opportunity for your communication to make a difference to them?

A quick checklist for success

- > Why does the customer care? Always start here.
- > Is the value proposition or key benefit visible? Understandable? Clear?
- > Are you talking to the customer in a conversational voice that is real and likeable?
- > Is there a clear call to action or purpose?
- > Do the copy and design work together to make it easy for your customer to do business with you?
- > Do the design and copy support your brand?
- > Can the customer get key information from headlines only?
- > Is there both an emotional and rational pull to your message?
- > Are you proud of this communication? Do you stand behind it?
- > Have the legal beagles reviewed it?

Grammar through the business lens

For language and grammar purists, we live in tough times. Pop culture with technology thrown into the mix creates a whole new kind of slang that is changing language with each email filled with emoticons and abbreviations.

As marketers, we need to follow the basic rules of grammar, and in cases of style and preference create guidelines that build a cohesive and comprehensive language for your company or brand.

Here are a few of our favorites that we see frequently confused in today's business writing:

Capitalization for emphasis

Avoid capitalizing for arbitrary reasons not apparent to the reader. Capitalization is still reserved for proper nouns, the beginning of a sentence, and headlines. In text, trademarked names can be capitalized instead of continuing to repeat a trademark symbol.

"Quote Happy Culture"

Somewhere along the way, we became a "quote happy culture." We often see quotation marks – especially the single quotes -- used for no apparent reason.

Here's the low down on quotation marks:

Single quotes are only used when a quote occurs within another quotation. In newspapers, single quotes are often used for headlines, but this is not necessary for business writing.

Commas and periods always go inside quotation marks.

Semi-colons and colons go outside quotation marks.

Question marks and exclamation points can go either inside or outside depending on the meaning:

His response to everything was "What?"

Can anybody really sing "the Star Spangled Banner"?

Names of newspapers, magazines and journals never take quotation marks, but can be italicized.

Politically correct grammar

Don't confine yourself to a continued use of his or her, and also don't choose one or the other. It's best to shift to the plural for clarity and to avoid awkward sentences.

Musicians love to hear the sound of their instruments being tuned.

A lot is two words.

Assure, ensure, insure

Ensure is usually correct. It means to make sure. You *assure* another person of something, and *insure* references the business of insurance.

Grammar through the business lens (continued)

Whether or not...
Weather is hot

The **Principal**...
is a man of **Principle**

Have a **Dessert**...
in the **Desert**

The greatest of **all time**,
reached an **all-time** high

Affect: as verb: to influence;
avoid using as a noun
(His speech affected me)

Effect: as verb: to cause; as noun:
result (She will effect change)

Like: compare nouns or pronouns
(Jim writes like a poet)

As: use to introduce clauses
(Jim writes as he should)

Beside: at the side of
Besides: in addition to

Farther: refers to a physical
distance

Further: to a greater degree
or extent

Baloney: foolish talk
Bologna: a sausage

-wide: not hyphenated
(citywide, worldwide)

wide-: usually hyphenated
(wide-open, wide-angle)

-like: only preceded with hyphen
when the letter l will be tripled
(bulllike)

**Pronouns for people or animals
with names**

Who: when someone is the subject
of a sentence (Who is there)

Whom: when someone is the
object of a verb (Whom do you
want to write about)

**Pronouns for inanimate objects or
unnamed animals**

That: is used with a clause that is
necessary to the meaning

Which: is used when the clause is
not necessary to the meaning

Everyday is the adjective...*as in everyday people.*
Every day, I go to **work**.

Internet is capped. **Intranet** is lower case. **Web** is capped.

A Case of the Its

Its is the possessive form of it. *Chicago is known for its great food.*

It's is a contraction of it is or it has. *It's a bird! It's a plane!*

Its' has no meaning.

Numbers

Spell out one through nine.

Use numerals for 10 and up – except at the beginning of a sentence.

Book titles are generally italicized in business writing.

Each is always singular

That and Which

Use that whenever the information in the sentence is necessary to complete the meaning. *John chose the lettuce that had the fewest wilted leaves.*

Use which whenever the clause adds information, but is not necessary. *John made a Caesar salad, which was his favorite.*

A person is a who or a whom – never a which.

Superlative versus comparative

Superlative forms of an adjective such as best, most, fastest, are used when three or more items or individuals are being compared. Two items use the comparative such as better, more, faster, younger.

Lie versus lay

Lie lay lain – what you do when you stretch out on the couch.

Lay laid laid – to place or put.

Affect and effect.

Affect is to *influence* and is rarely used as a noun. Effect is to cause as a verb and is a result as a noun.

When you *affect* a situation, you have an *effect* on it.

Like and As

Like compares nouns or pronouns. *Jim writes like a poet.*

As is used to introduce clauses. *Jim writes as he should.*

Compliment and complement

Compliment is to *praise or flatter* and complement is something that completes, makes up a whole, or brings to perfection.

Lisa received many compliments for her hairdo.

Lisa's new earrings complement her hairdo.

WriteVoice[™] *Tools & Tips*

Exploring what works for you

Whether you are writing copy for a web site, speeches or brochures, it's important to experiment and figure out what works well for you.

A Space to Write. Many writers choose a special place to write; a place where they feel comfortable and at their best. If you are confined to write in a corporate work environment, think about what you can do to the space to give you inspiration or take you outside your cube. Sometimes, it can be as simple as a postcard of a place you've been or a place you want to go. Another great escape for many writers is music. When I need to block out corporate noise, I often put Miles Davis' Sketches of Spain in my ears or the sounds of Hank Williams. It's hard to be stilted with the imagery their music creates. Think about music that creates a different space or even a wall of silence.

A Time to Write. Do you know when your brain feels most alive? For some people, it's the early hours of the morning and for others it's late at night. Many writers like to block out time each day to write; keeping the editorial muscle exercised and ready to go. Experiment with different times and see how you feel. If you are regularly under harsh deadlines at work, try writing in the early morning before the business day begins. That can give you a jump on your day and take pressure off.

The Walk Away. You've been slaving over your copy for many drafts and you're feeling frustrated and alone in the world. It's time to take a break. Even if you're under a stiff deadline, take the walk-away. A quick walk around the block. Going to grab a cup of coffee. Pulling yourself away can often give you back the clarity you need to look at your copy in a new way. Remember, when it seems hopeless, it's always looks better after you've walked away for even 15 minutes. Do it!

Find Inspiration. Feeling lackluster and uninspired? For writers, when you're feeling like a dry, crumpled leaf that often means too much time in front of our computer screens. It can be deadly for the most enthusiastic of us. That's when you need to go to the Zoo. Enter a Butterfly Zone. Enter a museum (whether art or park) nearest you and breathe it in. There's inspiration everywhere, we sometimes get so stressed we can no longer see it.

Humanizing the techno-jargon beast

How do we kill the jargon beast? He's become even hungrier since the Internet came along and gave everyone from teenagers to cyber seniors a reason to use technology speak. Don't do it. Don't fall into the easy trap of writing words that boggle the reader's mind.

Here are a few swords to help fight the Techno-Jargon Beast:

Tell the Story. What is the story that you want to tell your reader? Especially when you're writing about a technical subject, make sure you have a clear story to tell that is of interest to your reader. If you're an Internet Service Provider, how are you different? What can you tell me that I don't already know? What's compelling about your service?

Be Specific. In most instances, people use jargon because they don't – or can't – say what they mean. Saying you're a "leading provider of ecommerce solutions" doesn't tell anyone anything about what you do. Using specific and concrete language will save you from falling into jargon-speak. Do you integrate a company's inventory with back-end systems, write software, design web pages? Say it!

Warm up your writing with a more conversation style. This doesn't mean using slang and colloquialisms. It means making your writing accessible to your audience. For example, just using contractions can make writing easier on the ear. When was the last time you said, "cannot?" "Maeve, I cannot meet you at 7:00pm" sounds stilted and superficial.

Deliver the Punch. After you've read through what you've written, do you believe it? Does it ring true? What's the punch line or the pay off? What will make the reader care?

Would you say it to your Aunt Ethel? It's your final read for jargon before hitting the send button. You've come across a few words you're not sure about. Ask yourself two questions: will your audience know what you're talking about? Would you say it to your Aunt Ethel?

Proof it: proofreading tips

Give yourself a break

Unless your deadline doesn't permit, take an overnight break from your copy before you proofread. Tackling the pages after a good night's sleep will make your final edit much more meaningful and productive.

Always print to proofread

You will not see errors as easily on a computer screen as you will on the printed page.

Read documents out loud to proof

Reading aloud forces you to slow down and helps you catch mistakes you might otherwise miss. It also is a good measure of syntax and voice.

Don't rely on spell check

It just doesn't work. Sure, it'll catch some things, but won't know you meant to type "best" instead of "beast".

Creative brief

1

Overview of Assignment/ Objectives

What is the overview of the assignment? What are the objectives?

2

Background

What important background information is relevant to this project? Company history? Recent management or strategic changes?

3

Core Services

What are the key products and services?

Creative brief

4

Market Positioning

What is the market positioning? What do you want to say to your customer?

5

Target Audience

Who are the key customers (internal, external) that you need to reach?

6

Current Perceptions

What are the perceptions of the customer?

Creative brief

7

Core Value Proposition/ Customer Promise

What is the core value proposition?

8

Supporting Messages

What are the 3-5 most important messages that need to be communicated? (Are these aligned with the brand?)

9

Competitors

Who are the key competitors for this product, service, offer?

10

[illegible]

11

This image shows a single page of white paper with horizontal ruling lines. The lines are evenly spaced and run across the width of the page. There are no margins, text, or other markings on the paper.

Sources and reading

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Recommended Reading:

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<http://bel.avonibp.co.uk/bricolage/resources/websites/index.html>

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