



Communications

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Something's wrong here. What?

I thoroughly enjoyed your presentation that you gave last Tuesday.

Would you please send a copy of it to Lindsay, Rachel, and I?



Better:

I thoroughly enjoyed your presentation that you gave last Tuesday.

Would you please send a copy of it to Lindsay, Rachel, and me?



The point is:

The correct use of “I” and “me.”

Use “I” when in a compound subject.

Use “me” when in a compound object.



Something's wrong here. What?

Its extremely interesting that you should bring up the subject of noncompliance in connection with the contract we discussed. It's terms and conditions are not the most straightforward. I would agree.



Correct:

It's extremely interesting that you should bring up the subject of noncompliance in connection with the contract we discussed. Its terms and conditions are not the most straightforward. I would agree.



The point is:

The correct use of “its” and it’s.”

This is one of those hard-to-learn exceptions in the English language, when the apostrophe does NOT mean possessiveness. “Its” is the possessive. “It’s” is the contraction of “it is.”

Be careful. Be discriminating.

Something's wrong here. What?

The Athletics department is “all in an uproar.” They're not happy with their equipment. Who ordered it and who decided on the specifications? I think we should meet with the Athletics Director and hear their concerns. Or perhaps we could invite them to our office.

Correct:

The Athletics department is “all in an uproar.” They’re not happy with their equipment. Who ordered it and who decided on the specifications? I think we should meet with the Athletics Director and hear they’re concerns. Or perhaps we could invite them here, to our office.



The point is:

The correct selection of “there,” “their,” “they’re,”
“here,” and “hear.”



Something's wrong here. What?

I invite everyone in the office to attend the lecture that will be given by Professor Aldrich. If your not aware, he is the pre-imminent authority on the subject of time-and-materials contracts.



Correct:

I invite everyone in the office to attend the lecture that will be given by Professor Aldrich. If you're not aware, he is the preeminent authority on the subject of time-and-materials contracts.



The point is:

Correctly distinguishing between “imminent” and “eminent.”

”Imminent” indicates nearness in time. Something that will happen soon will happen imminently.

“Eminent” communicates importance or elevated status. Abraham Lincoln is an eminent figure in American history.



Something's wrong here. What?

I was negatively effected by the events of last evening. There affect was immediate and long lasting.

Better:

I was negatively affected by the events of last evening. The effect was immediate and long lasting.



The point is:

Choosing correctly between “effect” and “affect” when communicating.

“Effect” communicates a result.

“Affect” communicates an influence.

“Affect” (stress on first syllable) can also communicate a trait: “He has a particular affect about him that is intriguing.” Or, “She displays certain affects that hint she is better educated than she lets on.”



Something's wrong here. What?

I was so proud of Nancy that she was excepted into the graduate program at the university of her first choice. I wasn't particularly worried about it, accept I thought there might be a slight chance she wouldn't make it in.



Correct:

I was so proud of Nancy that she was accepted into the graduate program at the university of her first choice. I wasn't particularly worried about it, except I thought there might be a slight chance she wouldn't make it in.



The point is:

Distinguishing correctly when needing to use
"except" or "accept."

Practically everyone knows the difference between
what each word means, but the fact that they sound
almost exactly alike lures people into complacency
and, therefore, wrong usage.



Something's wrong here. What?

I need to convey to you the importance of good and effective writing style (e.g., getting your message across effectively in as few words as possible).

Stella did a wonderful job with the reception, providing many interesting items (i.e., party hats, kazoos, balloons, glo-sticks, etc.)



Correct:

I need to convey to you the importance of good and effective writing style (i.e., getting your message across effectively, without wordiness).

Stella did a wonderful job with the reception, providing many interesting items (e.g., party hats, kazoos, balloons, glo-sticks, and other fun favors).



The point is:

Correctly using "i.e." versus "e.g."

i.e. = Latin: id est. Or "that is. . ." Use it when explaining something further, not when listing examples.

e.g. = Latin: exempli gratia. Or "for example. . ." Use it when listing examples, not when trying to explain something further.

Personal peeve: "etc." The lazy person's list-ender. I prefer "and similar. . ." Or, best is not at all.



Something can use improvement. What?

As you know, the University has undergone several years of declining enrollment. Meanwhile fixed expenses – those that must continue to be paid – have increased year after year. The addition of several programs, while important, has put a tremendous strain on University finances. Finally, students are demanding improvements in food services and housing.

Accordingly, a reduction of budget in your department is being effected this academic year.



Better:

The purpose of this memo is to inform you that Administration must reduce your budget by 10% for this academic year. The main reasons are:

- The University has undergone several years of declining enrollment.
- Fixed expenses – those that must continue to be paid – have increased.
- The addition of several important programs must be maintained.
- Students demand improvements in food services and housing.

Please let me know if you have any questions or need a meeting to review departmental finances.



The point is:

When you have an “ask” or a “bottom line” to deliver, my recommendation is to lead off with it and then follow it with your justification. When you start off with the justification, your readers know that there will be an “ask” at the end, and so most of them will go directly to it, skipping all the preliminary verbiage. Better to just lead off with the message. Either way, your reader may not like it, but s/he will very likely appreciate how you organized the communication.



Something can use improvement. What?

I need to inform you about the credit card project, the eProcurement implementation, and the internal audit.

Things are stressful. Receiving is backed up and short-handed. The receptionist has called in sick again today. IT has put the eMarketplace project on hold for two days. The bank has sent an email asking about our affinity card program. Finally, the external auditors have asked us to identify the person in Internal Audit who specializes in IT security.

What do you want us to do?

Better:

The purpose of this memo is to update you on (1) the credit card project, (2) the eMarketplace implementation, and (3) a communication regarding Internal Audit.

1. The bank has requested information about the credit card project. Specifically, the affinity card. I took the phone call and will get back with the bank.
2. The IT department has put the eMarketplace project on hold, only while they do a short security review. Otherwise, it's on track.
3. For some reason the external auditors called us, asking about the person in Internal Audit who specializes in IT security. I gave them the information.

Separately, Receiving is short-handed today, but we made adjustments to handle the activity. The receptionist has called in sick again today; Michael is covering. I will investigate that further and give you an update.



The point is:

Readers like order and consistency. Start with your main message. If there is more, list them first in order of importance and then in the space below discuss each one in the detail you need, but in the same order as listed.

Always, if you have to go to your boss with “bad” news, try to have the recommended solution as well. Rarely should you “delegate problems upward.” It’s not always possible, but that is a rule you should always try to live by.



Something can use improvement. What?

You should study for the C.P.M. exam to make yourself smarter in order to be better educated with the result that you will be more noticeable so that you can climb that next rung of the ladder in order to land a higher paying position.

Better:

You should study for the C.P.M exam to maximize your promotion potential.

The point is:

All of us are guilty of over-using prepositional phrases in the effort to be complete and clear.

The truth is, we can almost always be just as clear by being concise and thoughtful.

Too many prepositional phrases puts your reader to sleep and waters down the interest in what you want to convey.

“Brevity is the soul of wit.” William Shakespeare



Tips...(checklist for clear writing)

- Is it to the point?
- Is your most important point obvious?
- Have you used simple language?
- Will your reader understand?
- Is it brief?
- Have you used the right tone?
- Have you eliminated unnecessary jargon?
- Do your sentences average 15 words?
- Are your paragraphs short?
- Are the spelling and punctuation correct?
- Will your reader know what to do next?

**(Source: Alexander Communications
http://www.alexcommunications.com/style_guide.htm)**



Just about the only reason you “fire back” at the other person is to make yourself feel better.

That’s it.

Once you’ve done it, though, nothing is better. It’s even worse! You’ve got the original problem PLUS your anger now has to be dealt with.

This is What Triggered the Response. . .

I was just politely suggesting that your estimator may have busted so badly because he used the specified roof, and not the one OK Roofing wants to sell you. Costs have increased since May, but certainly not enough to double the roof cost. He probably was not aware of the large premium that comes from using the state contract as well.

In any event, you were well aware that the golf course only intends to use the existing clubhouse for another seven years and are saving their funds for a new clubhouse. What would be the point of paying for a 20 year roof?



This is the Response. . .

I don't need your explanation.

Put all your projects out to bid. I don't need the problems.

You don't need to contact us further about doing any of your work. No I am not well aware of anything that is done anywhere at this institution. The golf course may never get a new clubhouse. If you don't want to pay the premium required to use the State Contract then again bid your work.



This is a Better Response. . .

I concur in the conclusion that the roof we estimated may be more than what is needed if the golf course plans to abandon the current club house in seven years and build a new one. Something to think about, though, is that building plans change frequently, as you know, and there is a better chance than not that the new clubhouse will materialize much later than desired, if at all. Additionally, if the new building is not located on the site of the current one, the current building will be available for alternate uses, in which case, the longer-term roof is justified. This is certainly an issue that deserves full discussion. I'll schedule a meeting.



Email Tips

1. Leave the addressee field blank until absolutely ready to send.
2. Watch "replies" and "forwards." Make sure any information below isn't hurtful or embarrassing. Edit as needed.
3. Let it sit overnight.
4. Have a trusted colleague read it.
5. Read it out loud.
6. Put yourself in the reader's place. Is there any ambiguity in your message?
7. Be brief. If length is needed put it in a Word document and attach it.
8. Call. It's almost always faster, and it gives you a chance to SHINE!



AVOID clichés AND *BUSINESS JARGON*

✗ Deep dive

✗ Leverage

✗ Reinvent the wheel

✗ Drill down

✗ Buy-in

✗ Low-hanging fruit

✗ Core competency

✗ Hardwiring

✗ Robust



SIMPLIFY AND CUT **UNNECESSARY WORDS** phrases

As a result of → **Because**

Despite the fact that → **Despite**

Due to the fact that → **Due to, because**

Every single → **Every**

For the purpose of → **For, to**

In accordance with → **By, under**

In addition → **Also, too**

In advance of → **Before**

In an effort to → **To**

Inasmuch as → **Since**

In a timely manner → **Promptly, on time**

Incumbent upon → **Must**

In order that → **For, so**

In regard to → **About, concerning**

In the event that → **If**

It is requested that → **Please**

Leverage → **Use**

Limited number → **Few**

Majority → **Most**

Necessitate → **Need**

Numerous → **Many**

On a regular basis → **Regularly**

Pertaining to → **About**

Provided that → **If**

Provides guidance for → **Guides**

Time period → **Time, period**

Utilize → **Use**

With reference to → **About**

With the exception of → **Except for**

In order to → **To**