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Business Writing Skills I: What Do You Want To Say?

By Linda Elizabeth Alexander

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Many web entrepreneurs are unfamiliar with business writing. In truth, concise writing will build your business because you will better connect with customers and prospects. In this five-part series, the author will teach you how to make your web communications, and all business correspondence, clearer, understandable, and more direct.

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Whether you hate writing or love it, it always helps to plan what you want to say. One method that has always helped me is the rhetorical square -- a mnemonic device designed to help you figure out what to say before you say it. I've seen other words used, but the one I remember best is "P.A.W.S."

Paws stands for "purpose, audience, writer, subject." P.A.W.S. is most helpful when establishing the goals of the piece you are writing and can be as formal and lengthy or informal and brief as you like. Ask yourself these questions the next time you sit down to write.

Purpose. What do you want to accomplish through your writing? Every composition has its purpose, even if it's just to finish an assignment. For example, you may write a letter to convey information, to sell something, or to say hi to an old friend. You might write a brochure to inform customers of a new product, explain your company's mission to them, or to serve as an advertisement for your services.

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Audience. The most important thing you need to know in order to communicate clearly through writing is whom you are writing for. Who will read your writing? Your mother? Your client base? Your boss? Every audience has a different level of experience and education. For example, when writing a report to your boss, you may share company jargon that the average Joe doesn't understand – because the average Joe won't be reading the report. Similarly, you will communicate differently to your employees and your customers.

Writer. Third, take into consideration the persona you will

assume when writing the piece. Think about the tone you want to use and the image you want to present to your audience. From what perspective are you writing? What impression do you want to give your readers? For example, if you get a new job, you will want to announce it to your friends, your clients – and your current supervisor. You wouldn't think of using the same tone in all three letters, would you? You might sound enthusiastic and informal with your friends and enthusiastic and polite with your clients. Depending on your relationship with your current supervisor, you will probably be official and reticent with her or him.

Subject (or message). How should you say it? The length or purpose of the piece lends itself to your subject. It's very hard to fit a full-length board report on a post card; at the same time, you wouldn't want to write a memo about your travels in the jungle during your summer vacation. Note that this the same as your purpose: your subject or message is the content itself; ask yourself what the piece is about and decide what is the most appropriate format for it to take.

Good writers routinely analyze the four elements of PAWS. Using it to prepare your writing, whether it's a personal email, formal business report, or your best selling novel, will improve your writing and get your argument across clearly.

Linda Elizabeth Alexander is a business writer and marketing consultant based in Longmont, Colorado, USA. Improve your writing skills at work! Subscribe to her FREE ezine. Write to the Point at lalexander@write2thepointcom.com or visit <http://www.write2thepointcom.com/articles.html>.

WRITING YOUR WRITING JOB DESCRIPTION

By Mary Anne Hahn

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Have you ever heard about the "motivational" concept of writing your own obituary?

The idea is, you write what you would like your obit to say, by summarizing all those accomplishments that you most want to achieve during the course of your life. Motivation gurus suggest that this enables us to focus on what's most important to us, while discarding those activities that truly don't matter in the long run.

Along similar—but less morbid—lines, I believe that we writers might find it helpful if we took the time to write our own writing job descriptions. If we could lead the writing lives of our dreams, what types of writing would we be doing? Who would our customers and/or readers be? In what niches would we specialize? What would we consider to be our strongest skills, our areas of expertise?

Or let's say that you want to diversify your writing goals. You could develop a job description for each niche. In this way, you could identify the experience and skills you already possess, and which ones you still need to work on.

Here's an example: suppose one of your writing career goals involves writing profile articles—of celebrities, politicians, business leaders, scientists, or just ordinary people who do extraordinary things. What attributes would such a writer need to possess? Excellent interviewing skills, obviously. Research skills would help as well; you certainly wouldn't want to walk into the interview with absolutely no background knowledge of your interviewee or his/her subject matter. Attention to detail would come in handy, too. What is your interviewee wearing? What can you say about his smile, or her vocal qualities? What does the interviewee's home or office tell us about him?

So your profile writing job description might look like this:

Job Title: Profile Article Writer

Job Description: Interview famous, influential and or interesting people, and write article profiles on them for publication in local and national magazines.

Business Writing Skills I: What Do You Want To Say?

Skills/Experience Needed: Excellent writing skills and attention to detail required. Experience in conducting interviews with people in a wide variety of occupations. Proven online and library research skills. Knowledge of publications with a track record of running article profiles.

Do you see how creating a writing job description for yourself might help direct you towards the kinds of writing assignments that you want to land? If so, spend some time today developing your own.

Mary Anne Hahn is editor and publisher of WriteSuccess, the free biweekly ezine of ideas, information and inspiration for people who want to launch and maintain successful writing careers. To subscribe, mailto: writesuccess-subscribe@yahoogroups.com



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