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Five Ways to Strengthen Your Business Writing

By Julie Ann Waid

All businesses produce written communications. From advertisements to internal memos, written material abounds in all industries. Here are five easy ways to make sure yours shine on paper!

(1) Who Are You Writing To?

Before putting pen to paper (or fingers to keyboard, as the case may be) the first question to ask is *Who am I writing to?* Is it an advertisement aimed for a specific niche in your overall target audience? Is it a memo written for your employees? Is it a press release headed to the media.

All of these audiences process information differently, so your communications must be specifically designed to speak to these audiences. Prospective customers want to know the benefits of your services or product, while the media wants to know why it's newsworthy. Not all audiences are the same. Don't write to them the same.

(2) What Is Your Main Message?

What is it that you want your audience to know? Often, many business communications, from advertisements to internal memos, don't have a single, main message that the communication is built around. Before you write, do a little brainstorming and make a list:

What is the one main idea of what you want to tell your audience?

What is the one thing you want them exactly to understand?

If you were to ask a recipient what's the one thing they remember from your communication, what would you like them to say?

The one answer common to all of these questions is the main message you should build your communication copy around.

(3) Organize Your Points

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Of course, there is much more to your communications than just the one thing. These are $\frac{1}{2}$ sub points. $\frac{1}{2}$ Ideally, they should support the main message.

Organize them so that they flow in a logical sequence from the main idea. Think of it as $\frac{1}{2}$ telling a story. $\frac{1}{2}$ It will make your message text easier for your audience to understand.

(4) Avoid the $\frac{1}{2}$ jargon trap $\frac{1}{2}$.

Every industry has its own specific language, from acronyms to technical terms. The list of such language, known as $\frac{1}{2}$ jargon $\frac{1}{2}$, is endless. And because jargon is such a part of the everyday language inside the industry, it's very easy to fall into the $\frac{1}{2}$ jargon $\frac{1}{2}$ trap.

The trap is writing to an audience that is not familiar with your industry language. Even I have fallen into that trap: As a journalist, the industry terms (such as $\frac{1}{2}$ cutline $\frac{1}{2}$ for a photograph's caption, and $\frac{1}{2}$ dummy $\frac{1}{2}$ for a newspaper layout that has not been printed) were so ingrained in my

vocabulary that I sometimes used them when speaking to people who weren't journalists. Their confused looks and oft said $\frac{1}{2}$ Beg pardon? $\frac{1}{2}$ trained me to watch my jargon.

Using jargon in an internal newsletter to employees or customers who are also involved in your industry (such as business-to-business communications) is fine. But putting it all over your website that's aimed for the general public at large can result in some very confused prospects.

A good rule of thumb to follow is to think of your audience. If 95% of them are not directly involved in your industry on a professional basis, don't use the jargon. Not sure what exactly is jargon? A great way to catch it (especially if you're writing to a general audience) is to show the piece to someone outside your industry and ask their opinion. If they are unfamiliar with the language, they'll let you know.

(5) Proofread! Proofread! Proofread!

In my time as a journalist, I cannot even begin to count the number of times I received business memos, letters, brochures, signs, press releases, newsletters, and any other imaginable communications vehicle that was full of the following: typos, bad grammar, and overall poor English. Not only does it make for a piece that is hard to understand, but it simply looks bad.

The best way to avoid this? Have someone (preferably two or three people) who have never laid eyes on the written project proofread it. Fresh eyes always spot things that writers miss. Take advantage of this phenomenon.

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Julie Ann Waid is a copywriter and editor specializing in marketing communications. Sign-up for her free newsletter full of marketing, publicity and business writing tips at

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The Write Habit: How to Strengthen Your Writing Muscle

By Katey Coffing, Ph.D.

Writing is a muscle that needs exercise to stay in shape.

I realized how true that saying is when I took what I called "a well-earned break" after I finished my first novel. The last few days of writing that novel felt as sweet as whipped cream—I was in a writing groove, humming along. I figured I'd take a little hiatus for a few days, then start my second book. No problem.

Those few days stretched into a week. Soon two more weeks wandered by and thumbed their noses at me. I felt guilty every time I passed my PowerBook. Then I began to avoid the computer altogether, a beautifully self-defeating habit.

Finally, twitching with dread after more than a month away, I sat down at the screen and began my next novel. Trying to write after that time away was torture. My neglected writing muscle had become flabby and whiny. It protested my sudden demands and resented being drafted to work.

For many people, the key to productivity is making writing a habit. Consistent writing breeds easier writing. If that's true for you, create a new habit.

Make a commitment to a certain amount of writing every day—a length of time or a number of words or pages to reach before you lift your butt off your chair. Each day when you've reached your goal, do something nice for yourself.

One of my published clients who loves email has chosen to write five pages each weekday before she can log in. She made getting her email a reward for completing her writing goals, and every time she slows down with her writing she remembers how much she wants to read her newsgroups and see her friends' replies. That spurs her to complete her pages, and she feels doubly triumphant when she hears "you've got mail!"

Is email not a good enough carrot for you? Find one that is, then earn it. Setting goals and rewards that make you want to keep writing create a great habit that's win/win.

Write away!

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Katey Coffing, Ph.D. is a novelist and book coach who helps women delight in writing (and finishing!) their books. Visit her at

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To receive additional articles and tips for women writers, subscribe to Katey's ezine, The Write Calling,

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WANT TO USE THIS ARTICLE IN YOUR E-ZINE OR WEB SITE? Please do, as long as you include the above short bio and blurb with it. (A short note to Katey to let her know would be appreciated!

Contact her at

<https://www.hform.com/form.cgi?1717945>

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