

AGENDA: THE NEED TO COMMUNICATE

Most business decisions involve the cooperation and interaction of several individuals. Sometimes dozens of colleagues and co-workers strive in unison to realize mutual goals. Lines of communication must therefore be maintained to facilitate these joint efforts. Without communicating ideas and thoughts it would be impossible to identify common objectives and purposes necessary for successful operations. Without communication and the team effort it permits, the successful completion of any important project can be jeopardized.

Some aspects of the project would be unnecessarily replicated while other tasks would be left unattended. Further, in the absence of adequate communication, colleagues would find themselves working at decisive purposes and perhaps pursuing opposing goals. What one team member may have worked to assemble one day, a second team member may dismantle the next. Without communication the chances for a successful outcome of any business endeavor are significantly reduced.

Successful Report Writing:

- Who are your readers?
- What is the best format?
- What is the best structure?
- What style should you use?
- How should you give recommendations?
- How can you improve your report writing?

Who Is The Audience?

As always, knowing who the report is for is critical. Implicit in that knowledge is the question, "What do they want to know?" As a general rule, readers of business reports are looking for two things: the bottom line and how will it effect me. It's also safe to say that your readers are busy, often extremely so. Use these facts to structure the report.

Start With the Bottom Line

All too often business reports start with some sort of introduction that includes a bit of history and, perhaps, the approach taken to getting the results or items being reported. Usually, however, the readers already have this information, so start with the bottom line. This might involve money or it may be the action the report recommends, or both. Make sure assertions and recommendations are backed up with solid information. History and methods can often be used as back-up information, but it will usually need to be rewritten so it fits.

Use Headlines and Subheads

Business readers scan for the information they need. Well-written headlines and subheads will help guide them to the parts of the report they actually need.

Use the Active Voice

If possible, write in the first person, as a ghostwriter. Avoid the passive voice like the plague. Even if the samples you are given use a lot of passive language, use the active voice; chances are the company will be delighted.

Visuals Can Help

Groups of numbers should probably go into some sort of table or chart. They not only break up large blocks of text, they also can clarify the information.

Use an Abstract or Executive Summary

Once you've got a handle on the information, create an abstract or executive summary. Include the recommended action and put this section right up front. Now you've got a business report that communicates the needed information easily.