

TOPIC C: WRITING BASICS 5: CLARITY AND TONE OF MESSAGE

“Is your reader receiving the message as you intended? Be sure to review the “tone” of your words!”

Success in business writing depends on effective communication, whether you are sending an email, creating a report, or writing a letter. You have had an opportunity to review the elements of business grammar and format, spelling, use of words, and proofreading. Clarity and writing tone are the final elements necessary to ensure that your documents, letters, and memos are providing the message you intended to offer your reading audience. In business, why does it matter if your writing is clear or not? Surely, anyone with half a brain can make out what you’re trying to say!

Try this one.....

“The purpose of this letter is to provide information you requested regarding there is in existence a grace period regarding payment of said medical insurance policy. Please be advised that the aforementioned is of a duration of 10 days following premium due date previously established at the onset of said policy.” (Iacone, 2004)



Ok, whew! Or this...

“After the due date, your medical insurance policy allows a 10-day grace period to submit payment.” (Iacone, 2004)

Same information, less baffling.....

When your message is *important* enough to make you want to get it across clearly, and when it's *important* to the reader that he or she understand it fully, clarity is obviously essential.

Here are some tips to help you keep your important writing clear in order to accomplish your purpose:

1. Be very clear about what it is you want to say.
2. Have a clear understanding of who you want to convey the subject matter to... Focus on that audience (and no other), and get some accurate idea of how to introduce your subject to that audience so they will willingly read your writing or listen to you.
3. Clearly focus on the purpose of your writing and what you need to accomplish with it. If you are offering directions or instructions to your readers, then prepare the foundation so there is no doubt about what you are asking them to do.

4. Make sure you use words that you understand and can easily define.
5. Take time to use correct grammar, spelling, and punctuation. A person who is familiar with grammar, spelling, and punctuation might reject your message (even though your message is valid and valuable) if he or she believes your errors indicate poor judgment on your part.
6. Use words and expressions that your readers are familiar with; if you use a term, abbreviation, or phrase outside of their presumed vocabulary, use it -- but give a helpful definition in parenthesis.
7. Ensure your paragraphs and sentences are reflective of the message and request for action. Eliminate the extras that only “decorate” the words and provide no value to the message. **Sentence structure** is crucial to clarity. It ensures that your information is presented smoothly and clearly to the reader and that you appear polished and confident.

Examples:

Before: It seems that of the two companies, Bloomington’s has greater sales.

Rewrite: Of the two companies, Bloomington’s sales are greater.

Before: Lorna Riley, who is our choice for the position, arrives Tuesday for her interview and assessment.

Rewrite: Lorna Riley, our choice for the position, arrives on Tuesday for her interview and assessment.