

Communicating on the Job

Tips for effective writing, speaking, and listening

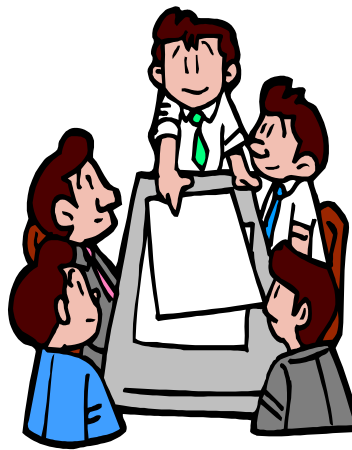
Speaking: (Uh) Get rid of (ya know) verbal (er) crutches

We often clutter our speech with verbal crutches—"like," "uh," "er," "well." We lean on these crutches to fill the silence when thinking of the next idea or word. The silence is better.

If you use these crutches, break the habit by pausing. Make no sound. You'll be surprised to see how quickly the next word pops up. And you'll find the silence is hardly noticeable—certainly less so than a stream of "ums" and "duhs."

Practice the technique. Place a reminder on your desk so that with each conversation or phone call you pause silently rather than "er-ing" and "uh-ing."

Whether speaking to an audience of hundreds or of one, strengthen your speaking—and your image—with a short, silent pause.



Writing: State your purpose up front

To generate response to your letters and memos, let readers know right away what you want—in the first paragraph. Come right out and declare your purpose:

- *The purpose of this memo is to inform...*
- *I am writing to ask that all managers...*
- *Please review the attached and send me...*

Start with "the bottom line," your intention. Give the background, reasons, details, and how-tos in subsequent paragraphs. They'll make more sense once the reader knows your purpose.

Stating your purpose up front may be unpoetic. But it's direct and clear—what business writing should be.

Telephone Talk: When leaving a message, slow down

Don't you find it frustrating when someone leaves a garbled message on your answering machine? Some callers rush through messages, particularly the part they know well but you may not—their name or phone number. ("Call garble, garble at 555-3 garble, garble, garble.")



To raise your chances of getting a response, give your message slowly and clearly. Imagine the party retrieving your message at a crowded train station. Make it easy for people to hear all your words, jot down key points, and grasp all digits in your phone number.

Spend a few more seconds in giving your message, and you'll save minutes by not having to make the call again.

When you need...

... help writing your reports, proposals, manuals, presentations, Website copy, brochures, and other documents, or your people need a refresher class in business writing or speaking, contact Cos Ferrara at 201-391-0178 or drcff@aol.com, or visit my Website: www.cosferrara.com

Presenting: Make your slides lean and pointed

Audiences will pay more attention to the slides than to the speaker when the slides are too busy, crowded with words and/or graphics. Limit what you put on a slide. Use only enough words to give the barest essence of the idea.

Instead of : *Discuss the possible effects of this action.*

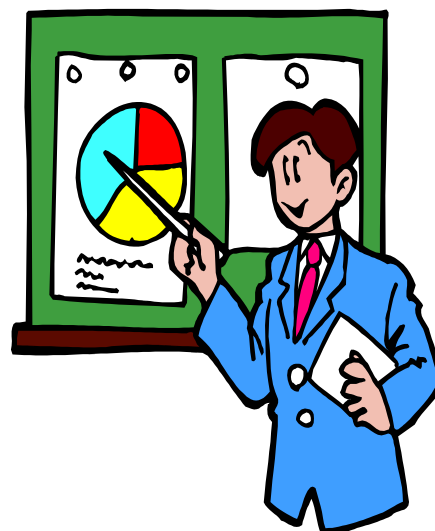
Show: Discuss effects.

Some presenters fill slides with so much text, the audience just reads the slides, ignoring the presenters. By

keeping the slides lean, you convey the essentials with greater emphasis and you force the audience to turn to you for detail.

Slides should be an aid to your presentation, not a substitute.

For a comprehensive tutorial on presentation skills, see Powerful Presentations, by Cos Ferrara. Order it on CD-Rom directly from Micro-Mash at 1-800-272-7277, ext.4150, or www.micromash.net



Watch Your Language! Don't be "notorious for misusing words"

Close counts only in horseshoes. To communicate effectively, use the right word, not one that looks or sounds like it, or has roughly the same meaning. Here are a few troublesome combinations to watch for:

affect, effect. *Affect* is the verb, meaning to *influence*. *Effect* is the noun, meaning *consequence*.

The change *affected* sales. The *effect* of the action was a drop in morale.

imply, infer. The writer and speaker *imply*; the reader and listener *infer*.

Your letter *implies* we are at fault. If that's what you *inferred*, you misinterpreted my letter.

reluctant, reticent. *Reluctant* means *averse to* or *unwilling*; *reticent* means *inclined to be silent*.

They were *reluctant* to take the project. At first she seemed *reticent*, but once she began, she spoke freely.

notorious, famous. A person is *notorious* for doing evil; *famous* for something positive.

"Use the right word, not a second cousin." Mark Twain

Mechanics: Use comma sense

Rather than trying to remember all the rules about comma usage, think of the comma as a signal to pause. Read the sentence aloud. Where you hear a pause, insert a comma. If you hear a stop, insert a period. No pause or stop—no punctuation.

Note how a pause is called for in the following sentence:

When working the machine makes good copies.

Without the comma after *working*, readers are likely to misread. With the comma signaling the pause, they

won't:

When working, the machine makes good copies.

You Try It. Signal the pause with a comma:

In expanding the management team broke with tradition.