

## Speaking: How to complain and get results

How do you complain about bad service or a lack of cooperation and get more for your efforts than the satisfaction of venting your anger? Leslie Beebe, a sociolinguist who has studied a long line of complainers, offers these do's and don'ts.

### Don't:

1. *Blame anyone directly.* That may start a debate over who is at fault and can get you nowhere. Instead simply point out the problem: "We haven't received the shipment. Can you help me find out when we can expect it?" That may elicit more help than: "You people were supposed to have sent that shipment last week. Why didn't you?"
2. *Get mad and stomp.* Because when you finish, you still have to deal with the person, who would then be even less likely to help solve the problem.
3. *Issue an ultimatum,* unless you fully intend to call the supervisor, cancel the account, or run over there and do it yourself.



### Do

1. *Be straightforward.* State clearly what the problem is, not what your frustration level is.
2. *Offer a solution.* Explain what you would like done to resolve the problem, rather than leaving it up to the other person. For example: "If it would be easier to send a duplicate shipment and cancel the original order, that would be fine with us."
3. *Stay calm.* Raising your voice and blood pressure won't do much good for you or have much positive effect on a lackadaisical performer.
4. *Try a smile.* Research suggests that people who walk around (or talk) with a smile have a much higher success rate at getting what they want.

*Complaints that focus on the issue and stay clear of personalities and blame are more likely to get positive results.*

## E-mail: No SCREAMING

Though business e-mail has the immediacy of a phone call, it has the formality of a document. So it should meet most conventions of a business document. At a minimum, e-mail messages should be organized, concise, and correct. Not using the spellcheck feature in a business e-mail is inexcusable.

Readers find e-mail especially annoying when it:

- uses all caps (that comes across as screaming)
- uses no caps (that comes across as careless or lazy and makes reading difficult)
- has numerous misspellings
- does not use basic punctuation, like periods
- lumps all thoughts into one disjointed paragraph
- tries to deal with issues that should be discussed in person or in a phone call

***Like any other written document, e-mail speaks volumes about the author. Be sure your e-mail messages speak favorably of you.***

### When you need...

*...help writing a newsletter, manual, business plan, or website copy, contact Cos Ferrara at 201-391-0178 or [cos@cosferrara.com](mailto:cos@cosferrara.com)*

## Presenting: Speeches are meant to be spoken



During World War II, Gen. Dwight D. Eisenhower asked Winston Churchill to comment on a speech the general had written. Churchill said it had too many “z” words—*finalize*, *prioritize*, and *systematize*. Churchill preferred *end up*, *rank*, and *plan*.

Churchill felt a speech should sound

like a person talking, more like a radio script than a newspaper article. Its language should be conversational.

In conversation we sometimes skirt grammatical guidelines for the sake of smoothness and comprehension, and Churchill advocated doing that in a formal speech or presentation as well. When someone challenged him on ending a sentence with a preposition, Churchill shot back: “That is pedantic nonsense...up with which I shall not put.”

### Starts and Stops

Conversation is replete with stops and starts, so presentations from the podium should be too. Just looking at—not reading—a speech written by his foreign secretary, Anthony Eden, Churchill said it was a bad speech.

“There are no dashes (—) and dot-dot-dots (...). A speech without dashes and dot-dot-dots is an article not a speech.”

Churchill might never had made such a strong impact on the Western world had he written: “*Essentially my contribution includes my sanguinary composition, diligence, effort, and commitment.*” Fortunately he spoke in language that could move people: “*I have nothing to offer but blood, toil, sweat, and tears.*”

Source: *The Sir Winston Method*, James C. Humes

(For more on presentations, see *Powerful Presentations*, by Cos Ferrara. Order it on CD-Rom directly from MicroMash at 1-800-272-7277 or [www.micromash.net](http://www.micromash.net))

## Mechanics: The colon (:) signals something special

Use the colon to call attention to an idea or a series of items:

*Our purpose is clear: to assess need and offer solutions.*

That sentence could be written without the colon, but the colon acts as an arrow, calling attention to the items.

A colon introduces a quote of more than a few words:

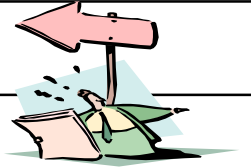
*Johnson says: “Good managers inform the staff of goals as well as accomplishments.”*

Use a colon to introduce an example, formula, situation:

*Some conflicts require diplomacy, and some require action. For example:*

*If payment is not made within 10 days, follow this procedure:*

***Use the colon to draw attention.***



## A Reader Asks...



**“When does a buzzword become a cliché?”**

Some business buzzwords become so popular they turn into clichés. People ride them like a hobby horse until what once came across as vivid expression strikes readers and listeners as worn and tired.

A few years ago, *scenario* was popping up in every speech and report. So too were *parameters* and *window of*

*opportunity*. Sports metaphors such as *level the playing field* and *raise the bar*, once fresh and imaginative, were so overworked they now sound trite.

### Do You Still Use These?

*Sea change*, which was a refreshing replacement for *exponentially* and *orders of magnitude*, has lost its spring-time freshness. As has *at the end of the day*, when referring to the wrap-up. For some time, *engine* and *drivers*

have been popular metaphors for the motivating force, but these may be, well, running out of gas.

How do you know when a popular word or phrase moves from imaginative expression to cliché? Perhaps it’s when you stop reading it in *The Wall Street Journal* but hear it all-too-often around the office.

***Use potent, popular expressions, but only in their prime.***