

Communicating on the Job

Tips for effective writing, speaking, and listening

Vol. 1 No. 2

Watch Your Language! Avoid sexist language: the subtle insult

Sexist language is offensive, even when it's used inadvertently. To avoid sounding like a sexist, replace sexist words with gender-free words.

<u>Sexist</u>	<u>Gender-free</u>
manpower	workforce
mankind	humanity
average working man	average wage earner
manmade	handmade

He/She?

For years, schools taught that *he* (*him, his*) is the accepted pronoun when referring to an indefinite person, as in: *A good manager knows the strengths of his staff.* Not so anymore. Use variations of *he/she* instead:

A good manager knows the strengths of his/her staff.

But *he/she* gets clumsy when you have to use it more than once in a paragraph:

A good manager knows the strengths of his or her staff. He or she must also know the weaknesses of his or her people.

To avoid this clumsiness, switch from the singular *he/she* to the plural *they*:

Good managers know the strengths of their staffs. They must also know the weaknesses of their people.

Writing: Play to your reader's needs

How do you get people to read your memos, letters, reports? Focus on their concerns.

De-emphasize the "I" and emphasize the "you."

Instead of:

I use this approach because...

Try :

You benefit from this approach because...

The "you" statement appeals to readers' self-interest. People pay attention when their own welfare, jobs, and needs come into play.

To Get Results

Which directive below would get better results?

- So that I can process benefits claims more easily, please follow these procedures.*
- So that your benefits claims can be processed more quickly, please follow these procedures.*

Directive (b) would generate more response because it is tied to the reader's benefit.

To move readers to action, slant your message to their interests.

(For more on writing, see *Writing on the Job*, by Cos Ferrara, published by Prentice Hall)

Speaking/Listening: Productive conversation requires dialogue



"The best sales professionals don't always make the best presentations, but they always ask the best questions."

Jack Falvey, *The Wall Street Journal*, 12/23/91

Successful communication is an exchange, two people sharing insights on the same topics. Their insights might be diametrically opposed, but each expresses an opinion and listens to the response.

Too often communication breaks down because, instead of being a dialogue, it becomes a monologue. One person—often the boss, the seller, the aggressor—does all the talking. This person hardly comes up for air, much less pauses for a response.

The monologist goes back to the office thinking, "I've sold them on the product now," or "we've finally resolved that issue." But, in fact, no buying will be done or the issue is far from resolved because only one side has been heard from.

Productive conversation—like good tennis—needs volleying from both sides.

When you need...

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

Presenting: Look ‘em in the eye

When presenting to a group, large or small, don't rivet on your notes or slides. Look at your audience and try to make eye contact with each person. Eye contact helps move your presentation from "speech" to "conversation," involving everyone in the audience.

As you speak, look into the eyes of one person; then after a few seconds, into the eyes of another. Or, shift your focus at natural breaks in your thoughts, such as after a sentence or long phrase.

Don't move your eyes robot-like but "roam" about randomly.

And don't lock on one person. That

may be intimidating. If a person seems uncomfortable with your eye contact, just shift your glance away. More times than not, however, eye contact will have a positive effect, helping you connect with each person in your audience.

With eye contact, people feel you are talking *to* them, not *at* them.
(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)



Mechanics: Make bullet points parallel

In business, we call attention to key ideas with bullet point lists. The bullet point list highlights important items, conveying nuggets of information in an easy-to-read format. When not overdone, bulleted lists work well in all kinds of reports, memos, directions, and slides.

In building your list, be sure all bullets are parallel, or similar in construction. For example, if the first bullet begins with a verb, they all should begin with a verb:

Our company can help you:

- **develop** your sales strategies
- **train** your sales staff
- **identify** your best sales opportunities

When bullets are parallel, they are more than grammatically correct. They are easier to understand and generate greater impact.

Don't mix constructions:

The change will help:

- **to attract** new business
- **in hiring** good people
- **because** we will be better able to plan strategy

Instead, make all bulleted items parallel:

The change will help in:

- **attracting** new business
- **hiring** good people
- **planning** strategy

Telephone Talk: Put life in your voice—smile!

Your telephone voice makes as strong an impression on a caller as your facial expression does on a visitor. Clients, customers, co-workers can easily tell from your tone of voice if you're bored, enthusiastic, annoyed, indifferent.

Your tone can even override the words of your message. "Can I help you?" becomes "Stop bothering me!"



when delivered in the wrong tone.

One way to sound enthusiastic over the phone is to smile. A smile automatically raises your pitch and makes you sound upbeat and glad to be of service.

A voice with a smile sounds like the voice of a winner.