

### Watch Your Language! Feel bad? Feel badly? And other tough choices

Distinguish yourself by using the correct form in each of these troublesome pairs.

**alot, a lot.** The correct form is always two words—a *lot*.

**among, between.** Use *between* for two and *among* for more than two:  
*There is agreement **between** the two managers but disagreement **among** the four vendors.*

**bad, badly.** Use *bad* as an adjective before a noun, as in *bad cholesterol*.  
Also use *bad* after a verb of being, such as *am, were, feel*:  
*His performance was **bad**. I feel **bad** about his prospects.*  
Use *badly* as an adverb to modify an action verb, as in:  
*She reacted **badly** to the news.*

**fewer, less.** Use *fewer* for countable things, *less* for degree or value:  
*We've had **fewer** applicants with **less** experience.*

**good, well.** Use *good* as an adjective before a noun, as in *good plan*.  
Also use *good* after verbs of being, such as *is, was, feel*:  
*Change **is good** and we **feel good** about the move.*  
Use *well* after the verb *feel* when health is the issue:  
*I **feel well** now that I've rested.*  
Also use *well* as an adverb to modify an action verb:  
*The new procedure **works well**.*



### A Reader Writes...

Teresa Puccini of Deloitte Consulting writes: "One of my biggest criticisms is letters that start with: 'I would like to...' Is it just me or do you also expect the wording that follows to be, 'but I'm not going to'?"

No, Teresa, it's not just you. Many of us find that type of cliché opener to be misleading, or at least a waste of words. Another one is: "I wanted to..." Does that mean the writer no longer does?

Instead of starting memos, letters, and e-mail with these empty cliches, start strong by using one of the four types of beginning as described on this page.

**If you have a question or comment on business communications, send it to me at [drcff@aol.com](mailto:drcff@aol.com).**

### When you need...

*...help writing reports, proposals, web copy, and brochures, or your people need a refresher class in business writing or speaking, contact Cos Ferrara at 201-391-0178 or [drcff@aol.com](mailto:drcff@aol.com), or visit my Website: [www.cosferrara.com](http://www.cosferrara.com)*

### Writing: Four ways to draw readers in

If you don't entice readers at the beginning, they may not read any further. So shape your beginnings artfully according to your purpose and audience. Here are four ways to start strong.

**State your purpose** to give readers a context.

*The purpose of this memo is to inform you of upcoming changes.*

**Establish your credentials** to give credibility to your ideas.

*Here is my evaluation of the system. In making it, I spoke to users, examined reports, and analyzed costs and benefits.*

**Preview the document** to make comprehension easier.

*As you requested, I have prepared an estimated budget, which includes a summary of expenditures by work area and an item-by-item breakdown.*

**Appeal to emotions** to create a sense of urgency or excitement.

*A recent study identifies eight qualities of a smooth-running department. By my count, your department scores well on three.*

(For more, see *Writing on the Job*, by Cos Ferrara, published by Prentice Hall. Order from [www.bn.com](http://www.bn.com), search word Cosmo Ferrara)

## Telephone Talk: Memory-joggers reduce phone tag

If you're on the phone a lot, you've probably felt the frustration of hanging up and then thinking of a key point you forgot to mention or ask about. To prevent needless follow-up calls, plan your outgoing calls and prepare for incoming.

### Plan Your Calls

1. *Crystallize the purpose of your call.* Write it down if you feel nervous about the call or should have to leave a message.
2. *Provide details the other person needs to answer your request.* For example, give names, dates, figures.
3. *Briefly explain how you intend to use the information.* The person may be better able to get what you want or more likely to respond quickly.

### Fielding Requests

If you frequently receive requests, prepare a list of the information you generally need to respond to those requests. Use a preprinted form with questions that elicit details callers overlook.

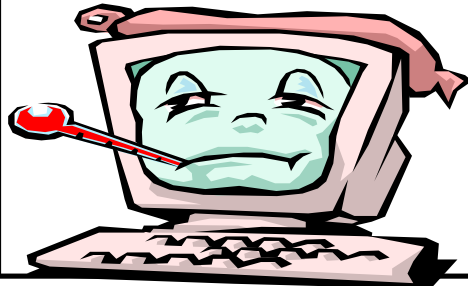


*Use memory joggers,  
to make the most of each phone call.*

## Facts about e-mail use

- ◆ The post office processes about 100 billion pieces of mail a year. The Internet delivers about 40 times that number.
- ◆ The average employee spends 2 to 2.5 hours a day on e-mail. Executives spend 2 hours daily.
- ◆ Employees send an average of 20 e-mails a day and receive approximately 30 every day.

E-mail inefficiency stems from poorly written messages that have to be clarified through a series of follow up e-mails or phone calls. Do what's needed to get it right the first time.



## Mechanics: Be consistent

"Consistency," Emerson once wrote, "is the hobgoblin of little minds." Not so when it comes to grammar.

Use the same person, tense, voice, and style throughout a passage unless there's a reason for changing. Illogical shifts can distract and confuse readers.

- Person Shift:** *We* use e-mail because it gives *you* flexibility.  
**Consistent:** *We* use e-mail because it gives *us* flexibility. (both first person)
- Tense Shift:** Let's assume the person *is planning* for retirement and *wanted* to invest some money.  
**Consistent:** Let's assume the person *is planning* for retirement and *wants* to invest some money. (both present tense)
- Voice Shift:** When a manager *corrects* an employee, it *should be done* in private.  
**Consistent:** When a manager *corrects* an employee, she *should do* so in private. (both active voice)
- Style Shift:** Our presentation displayed our expertise, which resulted in our *blowing the competition out of the water*.  
**Consistent:** Our presentation displayed our expertise, which resulted in our *totally eliminating the competition from consideration*. (both formal business style)

Shifts in person, tense, and voice are sometimes necessary. And a shift in style can create a dramatic effect. But don't inadvertently make illogical shifts.