

Communicating on the Job

Tips for effective writing, speaking, and listening
from Cos Ferrara

Vol. 2 No. 2

Writing: Uncover your talents in a cover letter cover letter

In the previous issue we talked about making your resume a selling document. But a resume is just one piece of the selling package. The other is your cover letter. They work together to persuade a hiring manager to put you on the short list of interviewees.

Customize the cover letter for each resume, as a form letter can easily be seen as boilerplate. Address your letter to an individual, if possible. Doing some digging to find a name when an ad does not give one may be a sign of your sincerity and resourcefulness.

A strong cover letter has three parts:

Opening: State your purpose and how you came to know of this opening—through an ad, the suggestion of a contact, or your research of the company. Give an overview of how you can help this company.

Body: Show you match the company's needs in terms of skills, experience, and work habits, and how you can benefit the company. Those are basic to getting through the initial screen.

Closing: Express your eagerness to meet, and rephrase your qualifications in terms of benefits to the company.

Recently I learned from your controller, Bill Kennedy, of XYZ's expansion plans. At Bill's suggestion I am writing to ask you to consider my application for the position of Associate HR Director to coordinate this expansion. I believe my experience in a similar corporate expansion could help you manage the personnel aspects of yours.

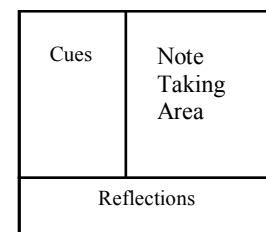
As Assistant Director of Human Resources at LMN, I drafted the basic plan for expansion. I implemented many aspects of it, including recruiting and hiring new staff, and coordinating integration of new employees. Management singled my efforts out as "instrumental in the success of the expansion."

My resume is enclosed. It details my corporate expansion experience, which I would be happy to discuss with you in terms of how it might help XYZ in your current undertaking. I look forward to hearing from you. Thank you.

Listening: Take good notes

Taking notes at a long meeting, seminar, or conference can help you focus longer, capture key ideas, and remember them.

One way of taking good notes is to format your note page in three sections, as shown in the diagram, and then apply four steps:



Record in the Note-Taking Area all the facts and ideas you can.

Summarize them soon afterwards in the Cues column. Summarizing clarifies meaning and strengthens memory.

Recite the points in your own words, using only your jottings in the Cues column, if possible.

Reflect on how these ideas relate to your work. Writing reflections makes the information yours.

Adapted from "Cornell Note Taking System for Seminars and Conferences," Office Survival, Microsoft Outlook Tips Survey

Presenting: A few words on visuals

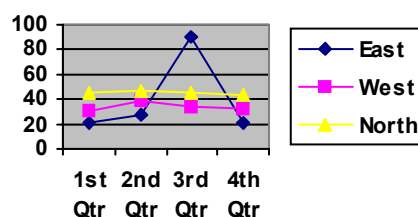
Used discriminately, visual aids such as slides and handouts reinforce a speaker's words, clarify a message, and improve recall.

Use Visuals to Emphasize

Visuals are effective at emphasizing a key idea or theme, or at making a dramatic point such as "The Three Problems" and "Short-Term Solutions." Such visuals help the audience recognize "problems" and "solutions" as important.

Use Visuals to Clarify

An image can sometimes convey the impact of certain types of information better



than words can. Tracing figures over a period of time, for instance, can often be more meaningful in graph form.

Use Them Sparingly; Build Them Lean

Don't use so many visuals that the audience focuses on the visuals and loses contact with the speaker. And don't over-build your visuals by putting too much information on them. To keep visuals from becoming too busy, think WORDS not SENTENCES.

A Reader Asks...

Do I need commas in a sentence like: "My mother, Mary, did x."

In technical terms, *Mary* as used here is called an **appositive**, describing the noun that precedes it, *mother*. Some appositives are set off by commas; others are not.

Set the appositive off with commas when it is not essential to identifying the noun:

Non-essential: My mother, Mary, did x.
Because the writer has only one

mother, the word *Mary* is not necessary to identifying her. The word *Mary* in this instance merely gives added information about the mother. Since the appositive (*Mary*) is non-essential, it is set off by commas.

Do **not** set the appositive off with commas when it is essential in defining, identifying, or limiting the noun it describes.

Essential: My brother Jack did x.

Because the writer has more than one brother, the word *Jack* is necessary to identify which brother did x. Since the

appositive (*Jack*) is essential, it is not set off by commas.

You Try It

Insert commas where needed.

1. XYZ CEO Marge Magee received a warm reception from the shareholders.
2. Stock analyst Bill Wilson rated XYZ a "buy."

Watch Your Language! Choose the right word

Substitute the correct word in those sentences in which an error appears.

1. I have no allusions about the challenge ahead of us. _____
2. Being that you have done this before, we are asking you to instruct the others. _____
3. We review the budget process continually, at least once a year. _____
4. To assure delivery, provide all details asked for on the label. _____
5. Call my assistant or myself with your questions. _____

Answers

1. *illusions*, which means "appearance or feeling that misleads"; an *allusion* is a reference to something, such as a *biblical allusion*.
2. *since* or *because*; *being that* is never acceptable.



3. *continually*, which means "repeated frequently"; *continuously* means "without interruption," as in *continuous performances*.
4. *ensure*, which means "to make sure or certain"; *assure* means "to tell confidently or positively," and usually is followed by a person (*I assure you*); use *insure* to indicate "arranging money payment in case of accident or loss."
5. *me*; use *myself* to intensify emphasis, as in: *I myself will do it*, or as a reflexive: *I questioned myself repeatedly*; use *me* in all other instances.

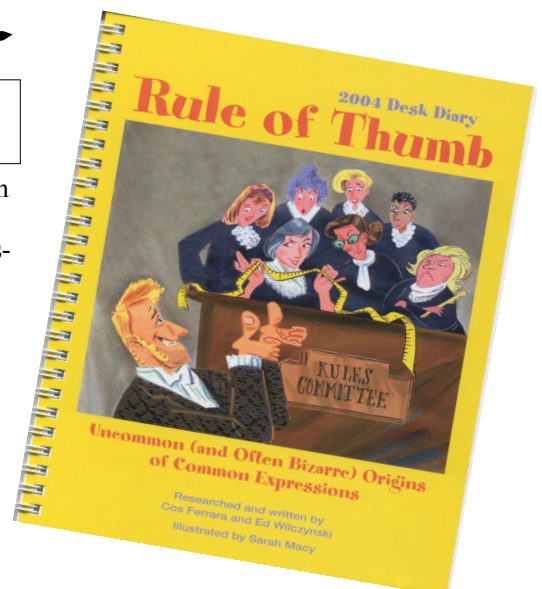
Why do we say "Rule of Thumb"?

Or "raining cats and dogs," or "fly off the handle," or "hell on wheels"? I've looked behind common expressions like these and found some interesting origins. For example, "rule of thumb" comes from an old statute in English law saying that a man may hit his wife with a stick if she misbehaves but the stick could be no larger around than the man's thumb.

I've put the origins of 53 of these expressions in *Rule of Thumb Desk Diary 2004: Uncommon (and Often Bizarre) Origins of Common Expressions*.

The desk diary treats a fresh expression and its origin each week. Every expression is accompanied by a humorous illustration. There is ample room on the facing page for listing appointments and events for Sunday through Saturday.

It's twin-wire bound, 6 by 9 inches, and sits flat on your desk. Great for seasonal gifts for business associates and friends. Add your imprint if you'd like. You can find it in most book and card stores or order online from the publisher at www.tide-mark.com.



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