

Communicating on the Job

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

Vol. 2 No. 3

Writing: Minutes of meetings

Taking notes at a meeting and writing up the minutes is unglamorous but important. Minutes are a record of decisions made and actions assigned, as well as the people responsible for them. If this job falls to you, consider it an opportunity to display a critical professional skill. To develop good minutes, follow these guidelines:

1. Before the meeting, ask the chair for the names of attendees and the agenda or a list of major points. Create a template for taking notes. Include a heading and space for: date and time, purpose, chair and attendees, major discussion points, decisions made, actions taken, people assigned responsibilities.

Template for Note-Taking

Name of Group: _____ Date and time: _____
Purpose: _____
Chair and attendees: _____

Agenda item (major point)	Discussion	Decision made; action taken	Person responsible for action
A.			
B.			

2. Complete as much of this template before the meeting as you can. That will make note-taking easier.
3. As attendees enter the meeting room, check off their names.
4. *Don't try to record all of what is said or who says what. Summarize what's being discussed and record decisions made and actions assigned.*
5. Avoid using names except for motions, seconds, and assignments.
6. Don't editorialize. (e.g., That silly suggestion was voted down.)
7. Type your minutes from your notes as soon after the meeting as possible.
8. Have the chair review the minutes. Make appropriate changes, send a copy to each group member (including absentees), and file a copy.

Writing Up the Minutes

Keep the minutes brief. Here is all that is needed for a major agenda item:

The group discussed feasibility of outsourcing mailroom operations. Attendees told of positive and negative experiences with outsourcing. Decision was made to see how affiliate offices handle mailroom. JW was assigned to research topic and report back at next meeting.

What may have been 15-20 minutes of discussion can be summarized as: "Attendees told of positive and negative experiences with outsourcing." Though your notes may be much longer, boil those down to the most essential for the minutes.

Sources: *MeetingWizard.org, EffectiveMeetings.com*

Telephone Talk: The phone should save you time

The telephone is supposed to save you time and steps, not cost you more. Here are a few tips for using the telephone more effectively.

- When leaving a message on Voicemail, tell the person exactly what you need. In that way, he/she can locate what you are looking for before calling you back, preventing the need for a second round of calls and messages. Conversely, when a request is made of you, save your time and the other person's by gathering all of the requested information before returning the call.
- When asking for a response in Voicemail, let the person know the best number at which to reach you (office, cell, other) and the best time to reach you.
- If what you are looking for can be faxed or emailed, indicate that a return call is not necessary. Be sure to give the number or address.
- Learn all of the functions on your phone—call forwarding, conferencing—so you can be efficient and effective in using Mr. Bell's invention.

Source: *OnlineOrganizing.com*

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...for a fast edit of your reports, proposals, business plans, manuals, and other documents that have to read right. Call Cos Ferrara at 201-391-0178, or email me at drcff@aol.com.



A Reader Asks...

I sometimes see writers use a possessive where I would not in a sentence like: *No one foresaw **their** failing.* I would use **them**. Which is correct?

A little known but often broken rule of grammar deals with using the possessive case of a noun or pronoun before a gerund. A gerund is nothing more than a verb with an *-ing* suffix: *writing, listening, or selling.* Note how the possessive case should be used before the gerund.

*I don't recommend **your** (not **you**) filing for this extension.*

(Use **your** because it is **your filing** (not **you**) that is not recommended.)

*We anticipated the **bank's** (not the **bank**) rejecting the mortgage application.*

(It's the **bank's** rejecting (not the **bank**) that was anticipated.)

You Try It

Select the correct word in the parentheses:

1. (Him, His, He) acting without prior approval is unacceptable.
2. It was the department (head, head's) insisting on the change that got him fired.
3. We appreciate (you, your) serving in that community service position.

Watch Your Language! Choose the right word

Substitute the correct word in each sentence containing a usage error.

1. It is the manager who's approval is needed.
2. Our situation right now is very unique.
3. There is no formal agreement; we had a verbal contract.
4. Has the group reached a consensus of opinion?
5. The recommendations were simple, showing no understanding of the real issues.



1. *whose*; *who's* means *who is*; *whose* is the possessive of *who*.
2. *unique*; the word means "one of a kind," so a thing cannot be *somewhat* or *very unique*.
3. *oral*; *verbal* refers to reducing ideas to words, either spoken or written; *oral* refers to spoken words.
4. *consensus*; *consensus of opinion* is redundant; *consensus* means a "general harmony of opinion."
5. *simplistic*; *simple* means "plain or uncomplicated"; *simplistic* means "overly simple and ignorant of the real complexities."

Answers:

Why do we say "Rule of Thumb"?

Or "steal my thunder," or "three sheets to the wind," or "knock on wood"? I've looked behind common expressions like these and found some interesting origins. For example, take *blockbuster*. During World War II, the Royal Air Force dropped huge bombs, a single one of which could take out an entire city block. Thus the term *blockbusters*.

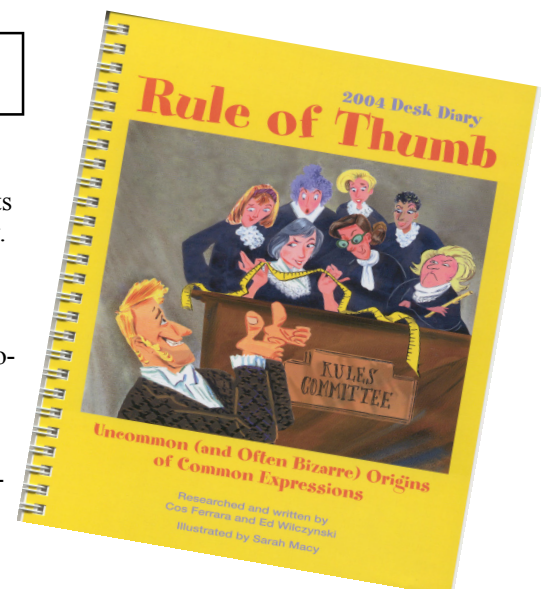
I've put the origins of 53 of these expressions in *Rule of Thumb: Uncommon (and Often Bizarre) Origins of Common Expressions*.

This 2004 desk diary treats a fresh expression and its origin each week. Every

expression is accompanied by a humorous illustration. There is ample room on each facing page for listing appointments and events for Sunday through Saturday. So it's fun and it's practical.

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