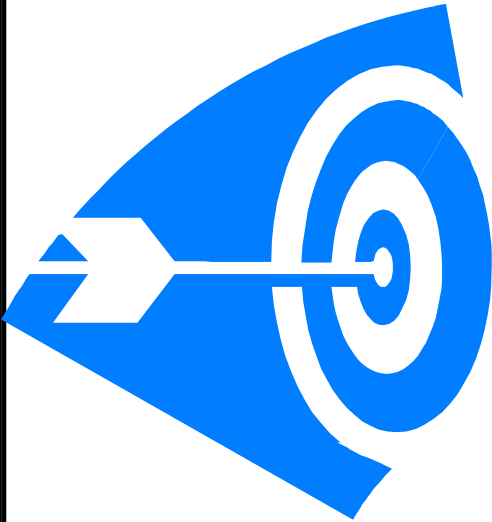


# Communicating on the Job

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

Vol. 2 No. 4

## Writing: Don't Overlook the Overview Statement



Enter a lecture hall in the middle of a presentation and you may have trouble picking up the speaker's drift. You hear the details but you don't have a context for them. That's the position you put readers in when you write a document without an overview statement.

Readers can better grasp the ideas in your memos, letters, and e-mails when you provide an introductory statement that offers a context, a purpose, a thesis—some general guideline as to what the document is about.

The overview (or umbrella) statement should not be long or complex. It should be in general terms:

*The purpose of this memo is to explain the new compensation formula.*

*I'm writing this letter to respond to your charge of discrimination.*

*The suggestion you made in your 6/23 email regarding the outsourcing proposal would not work for us for three reasons: control, compatibility, and cost. Let me explain.*

The overview statement is not always the first sentence in the document. But it should follow soon after:

*Thank you for giving us the opportunity to propose on the XYZ project. Our proposal will show that we have the industry experience, the technical expertise, and the right approach to make this project a success.*

The overview statement brings the reader directly into the writer's thinking. Note how this last example focuses the reader on the key elements of the proposal—the firm's experience, expertise, and approach. The reader will look for details on these three qualities in subsequent paragraphs.

Besides being an aid to the reader, the overview statement channels the writer's efforts, preventing aimless wandering and irrelevant rambling. It keeps both writer and reader on target.

## Telephone Talk: How to Handle the Telephone Job Interview

Many recruiters now do their initial screening over the phone. If you get such a call, here are four tips to keep in mind.

1. Stand up. When you are speaking with the recruiter, stand up. You will project yourself as being assertive and enthusiastic.
2. Look positive. Check your image in a mirror. If you appear positive and confident to yourself, your voice will convey that feeling of strength.
3. Dress up. If given advance notice, dress as you would if you were meeting the recruiter in person. Your appearance affects your manner and attitude, especially if you view yourself in the mirror.
4. Smile. A smile forces you to convey confidence and a positive attitude in your voice. The recruiter will hear it.

Recruiters call only when you have the basic background necessary for the job. They conduct telephone interviews to screen out candidates who don't have the level of enthusiasm or communication skills to perform the job. Following these tips can help you through this screen.

Source: Carol Kleiman, *The Chicago Tribune*

### Call the Document Doctor...

...for a fast edit of your reports, proposals, business plans, manuals, and other documents that have to read right. You can reach Cos Ferrara at 201-391-0178, or email me at [drcff@aol.com](mailto:drcff@aol.com).



## Watch Your Language! Choose the Right Word

Some words look and sound like others but their meanings are vastly different. Here are a few pairs of words you don't want to use incorrectly.

Agree to—to give consent  
Agree with—to concur

Ante—before  
Anti—against

Discreet—tactful  
Discrete—separate and distinct

Eminent—distinguished  
Imminent—impending; about to occur

Ingenious—clever  
Ingenuous—naïve

### You Try It

Choose the right word in the following.

1. agree to, agree with: I \_\_\_\_\_ your

assessment, so I \_\_\_\_\_ the contract change.

2. ante, anti: Please wait in the \_\_\_\_\_ room with the other \_\_\_\_\_-social people.

3. discreet, discrete: She was \_\_\_\_\_ about the four \_\_\_\_\_ incidents.

4. eminent, imminent: The arrival of our \_\_\_\_\_ guest is \_\_\_\_\_.

5. ingenious, ingenuous: The \_\_\_\_\_ inventor was \_\_\_\_\_ when it came to protecting his inventions.

## Mechanics: Be Positive About the Apostrophe (‘)

Of all the punctuation marks we learned in school, most people remember the apostrophe. Every time a shopkeeper hand-prints a sign, invariably there's an apostrophe—in the wrong place:

Waitresse's Wanted  
Childrens Haircut's Our Specialty  
Dad's Love Brunch Too

Uncertainty over the apostrophe also shows up in many office settings. For example, which of the following is correct?

- a) manager's meeting
- b) managers' meeting

Of course, a) is correct if one manager is holding the meeting. But b) is correct if

the meeting is for all managers.

### The Rules

Among its many uses, the most common use of the apostrophe is to show ownership. For a singular noun, add 's, as in:

the document's conclusion  
our plan's timetable

Even if the singular noun ends in s, add 's, as in:

the iris's color      Cass's report  
the press's persistence

Some people have a problem adding the s to a name that ends in s. Many publications omit the s in such situations. But most instructional books stick to the rule:

“if the singular noun ends in s, add 's:

Ross's      St. James's

You might make an exception to this rule when the additional s makes pronunciation difficult or a name ends in an “iz” sound:

Bridges' denial      Sophocles' plays

When the noun is plural and ends in s, add only the apostrophe:

The candidates' records were stellar.  
The companies' stock rose.

When the plural noun does not end in s, add 's:

women's initiative      people's rights

## A Reader Asks...

*In this age of technology and specialization, just how important are the so-called “soft skills”?*

Very. A 2002 *Wall Street Journal*/Harris Interactive survey showed that communication and interpersonal skills (often referred to as “soft skills”) rank number one among corporate recruiters. An overwhelming 90 percent of the respondents place a growing premium on communication skills, not the least of which is the ability to listen. These soft skills overshadow in importance even

traditional strengths like strategic thinking and work experience.

Many professional societies require mastery of communication skills before granting certification. The American Institute of Certified Public Accountants, for example, requires CPA candidates to write a number of business-related documents such as memos and letters as part of their exam. Those documents are assessed for writing skills, with the scores entered into their overall score.

Customers are people, so the people skills are still important. Alan Lemer-man, VP of HR at Pella Windows says: “We don't want satisfied customers; we want VERY satisfied customers. So we must have problem solvers and customer advocates throughout the company, people who marry the technical skills with the people skills.”

Our advice? Keep reading *Communicating on the Job*.

**Communicating on the Job is published for clients and friends of Cos Ferrara ([www.cosferrara.com](http://www.cosferrara.com))**