Style in Written Communication

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:≡	WHAT'S COVERED

In this lesson, you will learn about the importance of style in writing, and when and how to use various writing styles in professional communication. Specifically, this lesson will cover:

1. What Is Style?

Style essentially refers to the way something is written. One way to examine style in written communication is from a structural perspective. Words are a series of symbols that communicate meaning, strung together in specific patterns that are combined to communicate complex and compound meanings. Nouns, verbs, adjectives, adverbs, prepositions, and articles are the building blocks you will use when composing written documents.

Misspellings of individual words or grammatical errors involving misplacement or incorrect word choices in a sentence can create confusion, lose meaning, and have a negative impact on the reception of your document. Errors themselves are not inherently bad, but failure to recognize and fix them will reflect on you and your company, and thus limit your success. Self-correction is part of the writing process.

Another way to examine style in written communication is from a goals perspective, where specific documents address stated (or unstated) goals and have rules, customs, and formats that are anticipated and expected. Violations of these rules, customs, or formats - whether intentional or unintentional - can also have a negative impact on the way your document is received.

Style also depends on the purpose of the document and its audience. Strong self and social awareness skills can help you align your writing style with the needs of those intended to receive it.

> ↱ EXAMPLE If your writing assignment is for webpage content, clear and concise use of the written word is essential.

> ↱ EXAMPLE If your writing assignment is a feature interest article for an online magazine, you may have the luxury of additional space and word count combined with graphics, pictures, embedded video or audio clips, and links to related topics.

> ↱ EXAMPLE If your writing assignment involves an introductory letter represented on a printed page delivered in an envelope to a potential customer, you won't have the interactivity to enhance your writing, placing an additional burden on your writing and how you represent it.

Style

In written communication, the way a text is written in order to achieve a specific purpose, including elements such as word choice, tone, and sentence structure.

2. Three Writing Styles

Colloquial, casual, and formal writing are three common styles that carry their own particular sets of expectations. Which style you use will depend on your audience, and often on whether your communication is going to be read only by those in your company (internal communications) or by those outside the organization, such as vendors, customers, or clients (external communications).

As a general rule, external communications tend to be more formal, just as corporate letterhead and business cards - designed for presentation to the "outside world" - are more formal than the email and text messages that are used for everyday writing within the organization.

2a. Colloquial Writing

Colloquial language is an informal, conversational style of writing. It differs from standard business English in that it often makes use of colorful expressions, slang, and regional phrases. As a result, it can be difficult to understand for an English learner or a person from a different region of the country.

Sometimes colloquialism takes the form of a word difference.

↗ EXAMPLE The difference between a "Coke," a "tonic," a "pop," and a "soda pop" primarily depends on where you live.

Colloquial language can also be reflected in texting.

↗ EXAMPLE *ok fwiw i did my part n put it in where you asked but my ? is if the group does not participate do i still get credit for my part of what i did n also how much do we all have to do i mean i put in my opinion of the items in order do i also have to reply to the other team members or what? Thxs*

We may be able to grasp the meaning of the message, and understand some of the abbreviations and codes, but when it comes to business, this style of colloquial text writing is generally suitable only for one-on-one internal communications between coworkers who know each other well (and those who do not judge each other on spelling or grammar).

For external communications, and even for group communications within the organization, it is not normally suitable, as some of the codes are not standard, and may even be unfamiliar to the larger audience.

Still, colloquial writing may be permissible, and even preferable, in some business contexts.

IN CONTEXT

A marketing letter describing a folksy product, such as a wood stove or an old-fashioned popcorn popper, might use a colloquial style to create a feeling of relaxing at home with loved ones.

> Yet it is important to consider how colloquial language will appear to the audience: Will the meaning of your chosen words be clear to a reader who is from a different part of the country? Will a folksy tone sound like you are "talking down" to your audience, assuming that they are not intelligent or educated enough to appreciate standard English?

A final point to remember is that colloquial style is not an excuse for using expressions that are sexist, racist, profane, or otherwise offensive.

2b. Casual Writing

Casual language involves everyday words and expressions in a familiar group context, such as conversations with family or close friends.

The emphasis is on the communication interaction itself, and less about the hierarchy, power, control, or social rank of the individuals communicating.

⚙ **THINK ABOUT IT**

When you are at home, at times you probably dress in casual clothing that you wouldn't wear in public—pajamas, for example. Casual communication is the written equivalent of this kind of casual attire. Have you ever had a family member say something to you that a stranger or coworker would never say? Or have you said something to a family member that you would never say in front of your boss? In both cases, casual language is being used.

When you write for business, a casual style is usually out of place. Instead, a respectful, professional tone represents you well in your absence.

2c. Formal Writing

In business writing, the appropriate style will have a degree of formality. Formal language is communication that focuses on professional expression with attention to roles, protocol, and appearance.

It is characterized by its vocabulary and syntax, or the grammatical arrangement of words in a sentence. That is, writers using a formal style tend to use a more sophisticated vocabulary - a greater variety of words, and more words with multiple syllables - not for the purpose of throwing big words around, but to enhance the formal mood of the document. They also tend to use more complex syntax, resulting in sentences that are longer and contain more subordinate clauses.

The appropriate style for a particular business document may be very formal, or less so.

↗ EXAMPLE If your supervisor writes you an email and you reply, the exchange may be informal in that it is fluid and relaxed, without much forethought or fanfare, but it will still reflect the formality of the business environment. Chances are you will be careful to use an informative subject line, a salutation ("Hi *supervisor's name*" is typical in emails), a word of thanks for whatever information or suggestion they provided you, and an indication that you stand ready to help further if need be. You will probably also check your grammar and spelling before you click "send."

A formal document such as a proposal or an annual report will involve a great deal of planning and preparation, and its style may not be fluid or relaxed. Instead, it may use distinct language to emphasize the prestige and professionalism of your company.

↗ EXAMPLE Say you are going to write a marketing letter that will be printed on company letterhead

and mailed to a hundred sales prospects. Naturally you want to represent your company in a positive light. In a letter of this nature, you might write a sentence like "The Widget 300 is our premium offering in the line; we have designed it for ease of movement and efficiency of use, with your success foremost in our mind." But in an email or a tweet, you might use an informal sentence instead, reading "W300— good stapler."

Writing for business often involves choosing the appropriate level of formality for the company and industry, the particular document and situation, and the audience.

☑ SUMMARY

In this lesson, you learned that **style is** the way something is written. There are **three writing styles** that you will commonly encounter, including **colloquial writing** (a highly informal, conversational style), **casual writing** (an everyday style appropriate for family or friends), and **formal writing** (a more sophisticated style appropriate for most business writing). Strong self and social awareness skills help you to choose the right style for the right context.

Best of luck in your learning!

Source: This tutorial has been adapted from "Business Communication for Success" Version 1.0 by Scott McLean. Copyright 2010. ISBN 978-1-4533-2742-5 (Licensee Product: Workplace Communication), reprinted with permission from FlatWorld.

📄 TERMS TO KNOW

Style
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