Writing That Works

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Writing That Works: Agenda

Strategies

- **The writing process**
  - Analyze, anticipate, adapt
  - Research, organize, compose
  - Revise, proofread, evaluate

- **Direct versus indirect approach**

- **Email**

The Basics

- **Misused words**
- **Common grammar errors**
  - Possessives
  - Comma splices
  - Dangling participles
  - Impersonal “you”
  - Singular vs. plural pronouns

- **Style**
  - Parallelism
  - Conciseness
  - Directness
Writing That Works:

Misused Words

- **There, their, and they’re**
  - There = location
  - Their = belonging to them
  - They’re = they are

- **Two, to, and too**
  - Two = 2
  - To = possession or movement
  - Too = also

- **Then and than**
  - Then = time
  - Than = comparison
Writing That Works:

Misused Words

- Assure, ensure, and insure
  - Assure = to make confident
  - Ensure = to make certain
  - Insure = to issue an insurance policy

- It’s and its
  - It’s = it is
  - Its = possession

- You’re and your
  - You’re = you are
  - Your = possession
Writing That Works:
Misused Words

- **Affect and effect**
  - Affect = To make an impression, influence, or effect on something (verb)
  - Effect = A result or consequence (noun)

- **Accept and except**
  - Accept = to receive
  - Except = to leave out, exception

- **Advice and advise**
  - Advice = information
  - Advise = to provide information
Writing That Works:
Misused Words

- Lay and lie
  - Lay = When the object is being laid down
  - Lie = When the object lays itself down

- Fewer and less
  - Fewer = things that can be counted
  - Less = uncountable things or abstract concepts
Writing That Works:
Misused Words

- Among and between
  - Among = three or more
  - Between = comparison between two

- Amount and number
  - Amount = quantities in bulk
  - Number = things that can be counted
Misused Words: Exercises

WRITING THAT WORKS
Writing That Works:
Common Grammar Errors

- **Possessives**
  - Apostrophe use
  - Plurals with apostrophes
  - Confusion with subject/verb agreement
  - Exceptions to the rule (whose, its)

- **Comma splices**
  - Use of a comma to connect two complete sentences
  - Corrective actions:
    - Period
    - Semi-colon
    - Conjunction (and, also, because, etc.)
Writing That Works: Common Grammar Errors

- Dangling participles
  - When the verb (ending with “ing”) doesn’t agree with the subject
  - Often a result of passive voice
    - Example:
      While walking down the street, the cat caught my attention. –Who is walking?!?

- The impersonal “you”
  - Using “you” instead of “people”
    - Example:
      You must work hard to make a living.
      - INCORECT
      People must work hard to make a living.
      - CORRECT
• **Singular versus plural pronouns**
  - When using indefinite pronouns, the antecedent to the verb must be singular. The easy fix is to make the pronoun definite and/or plural.

  » **Example:**
  - Everyone wants to have their own computer.
    - INCORRECT!
  - Everyone wants to have his or her own computer.
    - CORRECT BUT STRANGE!
  - All employees would like to have their own computers.
    - CORRECT AND BETTER!
Common Grammar Errors: Exercises

WRITING THAT WORKS
Writing That Works:

**Style**

Parallelism

Disrupts reader’s expectations when a series starts with one kind of unit and suddenly shifts to another.

- Within a sentence (commas)
- Within a set of bulleted items
Parallelism Examples  
(Note: the following examples are all INCORRECT!)

1. He was a miser, bachelor, and egotistical. (noun, noun, adjective)
2. He was healthy, wealthy, and an athlete (adj., adj., noun)
3. Lincoln was a man of the people, for the people, and loved by the people. (prepositional phrase, prepositional phrase, participle phrase)
Conciseness

A message should make its point using the fewest words possible.

You should:
- Remove opening fillers
- Eliminate redundancies
- Reduce compound prepositions
- Purge empty words
Writing That Works:

Style

Conciseness: Remove Opening Fillers

Openers like *there is/are* and *it is* fill in sentences but add no meaning.

- There are three things I want you to do. (wordy)
- I want you to do three things. (concise)

- It is important to start meetings on time. (wordy)
- Starting meetings on time is important. (concise)
Writing That Works:  

**Style**

Conciseness: Eliminate Redundancies

Say it only once. Repeating yourself wastes your time and weakens the point you want to emphasize.

Watch for--
- Redundant words
- Redundancies using conjunctions, adverbs, and prepositions
Writing That Works: Style

Conciseness: Eliminate Redundancies (Examples)

- Advance warning
- Dollar amount
- End result
- Perfectly clear
- Great majority
- New changes
- Past history
- Serious interest
- Personal opinion
- True facts
- Alter or change
- Consensus of opinion
- Each and every
- Few in number
- Free and clear
- Necessary and important
- Visible to the eye
- Last and final
Writing That Works:

Style

Conciseness: Reduce Compound Prepositions

Replace phrases with a single word when possible.

- At this point in time — now
- At such time — when
- Due to the fact — because
- For the amount of — for
- In regards to — regarding
- The manner in which — how
Writing That Works: Style

Directness

Avoid noun phrases and trite business sayings. They tend to muddy meaning.

- Noun phrases: changing verbs into nouns (we make a recommendation of instead of we recommend)
- Trite business phrases: “business-ese”
Writing That Works: Style

Directness: Noun Phrases

- Conduct a discussion of—discuss
- Engage in the preparation of—prepare
- In regards to—regarding
- Perform an analysis of—analyze
- Take action on—act
Directness: Trite Business Phrases

- As per your request—as you requested
- Every effort will be made—we will try
- In receipt of—have received
- Please do not hesitate—please
- Under separate cover—separately
- With reference to—about
Style: Exercises

WRITING THAT WORKS
Writing That Works:
Writing Process

The 3-x-3 Writing Process

Phase 1
- Analyze
- Anticipate
- Adapt

Phase 2
- Research
- Organize
- Compose

Phase 3
- Revise
- Proofread
- Evaluate
Writing That Works:

Writing Process

Writing Process: Phase 1 (Prewriting)

- Analyze & Anticipate = Audience awareness.
  - Position relative to yours
  - Individual versus general
  - Knowledge base

- Adapt
  - Language use (formal versus informal)
  - Format
  - Mode of delivery
Writing That Works:

Writing Process

Writing Process: Phase 2 (Writing)

- Research
  - What does the audience need to know?
  - What does the audience need to do?

- Organize
  - Grouping ideas into categories
  - Assessing appropriate approach (direct versus indirect)
  - Outlining

- Compose
  - Drafting (multiple)
Writing That Works:

Writing Process

Writing Process: Phase 3 (Revising)

- Revise
  - Conceptual revision
  - Style revision

- Proofread
  - Editing for correctness

- Evaluate
  - Plan shortcuts for the future
The Direct Approach

- Get right to the point in the first sentence.

- Use when
  - Delivering information
  - Anticipating no resistance to the message
The Indirect Approach

- Delay the main point until later in the message (example: second paragraph).
  - Begin with a “buffer” that emphasizes areas of agreement with the audience.

- Use when
  - Attempting to persuade
  - Anticipating resistance to the message
Writing That Works:

Email

Usage:

- Use for short messages

  - Email messages should never be more than one screen long.
  
  - Longer messages should be attached to a brief email message, in memo format (or appropriate format).
Writing That Works:
Email

Structure:
- Subject line
  - Should be informative!
- Salutation
  - “Dear Dr. Zhivago:”
  - “Hi Joe,”
- Body
  - Use direct or indirect approach as appropriate
- Goodwill statement & close
  - Recognize that a human being is reading your message!
  - “Sincerely,” “See you later,”
  - ALWAYS include your name!
Hi Joe,

After our discussion yesterday I came up with three options for our alumni database issue. The database has two major problems. First, it contains many names of individuals who are no longer active in events at CSUF. Second, the format is not compatible with the new Access software we’re currently using.

These procedures should solve both problems:

1. Start a new database. Effective immediately enter the names of all new alumni in a new database using the Access software.
2. Determine the status of alumni in our old database. Send out a mailing asking whether recipients want to continue receiving our newsletter and other announcements.
3. Rekey or scan the names of active alumni. Enter the names of all responding alumni in our new database so that we only have one active database.

These changes will enable you to request mailings that go only to active alumni. Please let me know by February 25 whether you think these recommendations are workable. If so, I will investigate the costs to implement.

All the best,

Tuffy