



# Effective Writing Skills

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## What We'll Cover Today . . .

### Our Goal: Write It So They Will Read It

#### Write It Correctly

- Fix the most common punctuation glitches
- Fix sentence structure glitches

#### Write It Professionally

- 12 Best Practices for writing email people will read
- Write email that will get the results you want



**Write it Correctly**  
(Things You Might Have Forgotten  
Since 7<sup>th</sup> Grade)



## Write it Correctly

### The Commas People Miss the Most

Write your sentences by these rules:

<p><b>Two Sentences</b></p>	<p><u>It was raining</u> this morning.</p> <p>I <u>had</u> to leave for work an hour early.</p>
<p><b>Compound Sentence</b></p> <p><b>Caution: Only Two Verbs</b></p>	<p><u>It was pouring</u> down rain this morning, and I <u>had</u> to leave for work an hour early.</p> <p>Chris <u>was</u> exhausted after the meeting but still <u>went</u> to work out afterwards.</p>
<p><b>Make one an <u>Introductory</u> Phrase</b></p>	<p><u>Because it was raining this morning</u>, I <u>had</u> to leave for work an hour early.</p>
<p><b>Move the Phrase to the <u>end</u></b></p>	<p>I <u>had</u> to leave for work an hour early this morning <u>because it was raining</u>.</p>
<p><b>Essential phrase in the <u>middle</u></b></p> <p><b>Nonessential phrase in the <u>middle</u></b></p>	<p>The budget <u>that I emailed to everyone last week</u> <u>highlighted</u> two discrepancies.</p> <p>The 2021 budget, <u>which went through three proofreadings</u>, <u>highlighted</u> two discrepancies.</p>
<p><b>Transitional words.</b></p> <p><b><u>Introductory:</u></b></p> <p><b><u>In the middle:</u></b></p>	<p><u>Unfortunately</u>, I am already scheduled for a full-day meeting with our auditors that same day.</p> <p>I am, <u>however</u>, available on April 2 or 3 if that works with your calendar.</p>
<p><b>Series</b></p>	<p>The job involves restocking shelves, <u>cleaning</u>, and serving the customers.</p>



## Write it Correctly Practice

Underline subjects and verbs in your core sentence.

Write down the type of commas used (or not used

(Compound sentence, Just two verbs, Intro words, Essential phrase, Nonessential phrase, Transitional words (Intro and Middle), Series)

\_\_\_\_\_

1. When you decide on your vacation days let me know and I will add them to the master calendar.

\_\_\_\_\_

2. The conversation that I had with Hank yesterday was long overdue.

\_\_\_\_\_

3. Andrea Kelly who has been our top salesperson for the last three years is transferring to our Dallas office next month.

\_\_\_\_\_

4. Unfortunately we don't have a succession plan in place yet.

\_\_\_\_\_

5. I plan to hold some internal interviews to fill Andrea's position but I will probably have to look outside the company as well.

\_\_\_\_\_

6. I will ask Andrea if she will help train her replacement assuming we can get someone hired before she leaves at the end of the month.

\_\_\_\_\_

7. I am available to attend the conference on September 20 and will mail you my check for the hotel.

\_\_\_\_\_

8. I will however need to leave about 3:30 p.m. to catch a flight home.

\_\_\_\_\_

9. I plan to book a flight on Southwest Airlines because I have travel points.

\_\_\_\_\_

10. If you book a rental car I will just take an Uber to the hotel and meet you there.

\_\_\_\_\_

11. There are no claim forms to fill out no deductibles and no benefit maximums.

\_\_\_\_\_

12. He spoke at great length about the necessity of providing training but failed to identify ways to obtain the additional funding needed.





**Write It Professionally**  
***(12 Best Practices)***

# Professional Writing Skills

## 1. Our Writing Goals

- Write it so people will read it
- Write it to get the response you desire

## 2. Here's How . . . Best Practices for Writing Effective Email

- Write it correctly (Spell Check doesn't catch incorrect grammar)
- Write it professionally
  - Use the right tone (to get the reaction you want)
  - Write it simply and clearly (so they keep reading)
  - Write it positively (customer relation focus)
  - Write with a plan (with an organized trail)

## 3. Two questions to answer before you write:

- What do I want the outcome to be?
- Will my email get the reaction I want?

## 4. One more question before you send it . . .

Should I reach out them by phone or in person before I send them an email?

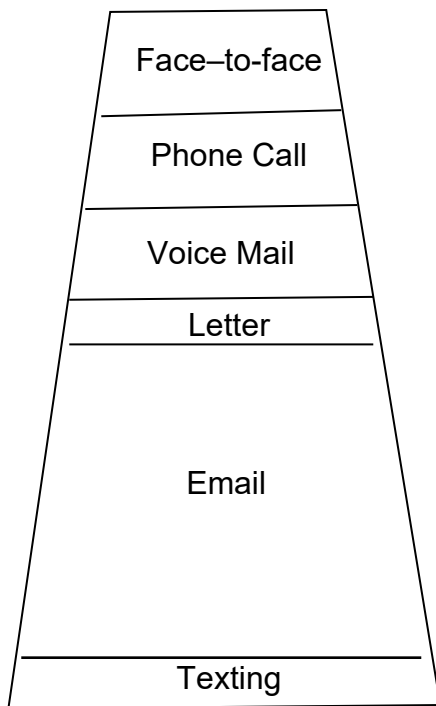


## Best Practice No. 1

### Understand the Communication Hierarchy

Email is quick and convenient, but it is not always the **best** means of communication. A phone call or one-on-one conversation might still be your best choice.

#### Communication Hierarchy



#### When is email not the best way to communicate—initially?



## Best Practice No. 2

### Write it Respectfully—No Matter What

#### 1. Always write professionally and respectfully

- No email when dealing with emotional issues (yours or theirs).
- Write as if your \_\_\_\_\_ were reading it.
- Sarcasm never works (particularly when you are annoyed or frustrated).
- No rumor or gossip—ever!

#### 2. Don't annoy them

- “I want it on the first screen.”
- Use “Priority” with discretion—don’t “Cry Wolf.”
- Use “Read Receipt” only if needed.
- Typing in ALL CAPS (IT’S NOT POLITE TO YELL!).
- Typing in all lower case (looks like you don’t know how to type well).
- No ‘texting’ language (RU going?).
- Be careful using exclamation points—and only use one.
- Don’t connect all your sentences with elliptical dots ( . . . ).
- Emoticons (smileys, etc.)—know your audience.  
(Remember, they may forward your email higher in the company)
- No colored fonts, background, or wallpaper.
- ‘Reply All’  
(Don’t send your email messages to the world)
- Respect their time (pay attention to your Distribution Lists)
- Use Read Receipts only if needed.





## Best Practice No. 3

### Manage Your Approach and Your Tone

#### 1. Your Approach

- Direct Approach \_\_\_\_\_  
\_\_\_\_\_
  
- Indirect Approach \_\_\_\_\_  
\_\_\_\_\_

#### 2. Your Tone

- How formal or conversational? (who are your readers?)
  - Too stuffy and old . . .
    - *Pursuant to your request . . .*
    - *The supervisor articulated that . . .*
  
  - Too conversational (folksy) . . .
    - *Give this a read through and call me . . .*
    - *I want you to know where I'm at with the project . . .*
  
- How do you want your reader to feel?

**Remember, our customers (external and internal) want two things from us:**

1. Do what you can do (fix what you can fix).
2. Make me feel \_\_\_\_\_

#### 3. Practice: We can't complete the RFQ process with incomplete information.

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## Best Practice No. 4

### Say It Simply

#### 1. Use Short, Simple Words

Remember, our job is to communicate with our readers . . . to express ourselves clearly, rather than trying to impress them with big words.

**Instead of . . .**            **Use . . .**

Utilize	
execute	
initiate	
optimum	
disseminate	

#### 2. Omit Out-of-Date Wording

<u>Out-of-Date Wording . . .</u>	<u>Everyday Wording . . .</u>
1. Please advise	
2. As per our conversation	
3. Please do not hesitate to call	
4. Feel free to call	
5. Please be advised	
6. Thank you in advance	
7. In the amount of	
8. ASAP	
9. Thank you for your prompt attention to this matter.	



## Best Practice No. 4

### Say It Simply (cont.)

### 3. Write Easy-To-Read Sentences & Paragraphs

#### Length Guidelines:

- Average sentence length:  
Sentences: \_\_\_\_\_ words
- Average paragraph lengths:  
Non-technical material: \_\_\_\_\_ lines  
Technical material: \_\_\_\_\_ lines

#### Rule No. 1

- Keep your core sentence clean and clear.
- Keep your sentences short—but not abrupt

#### Rule No. 2

#### **Put the subject as close to the beginning as possible.**

*The overall condition of your bank is less than satisfactory. Credit risk is elevated, risk management is less than satisfactory, and capital is not adequate to support the current risk profile of the bank.*

#### Rule No. 3

#### **Put the subject and verb as close together as possible.**

- Any explanatory material in between the subject and verb should be as short as possible.

The MLT conference, which Julie will debrief with us when we meet next week, provided us with pamphlets to review.

The MLT conference provided us with pamphlets to review. Julie will debrief with us when we meet next week.



## Best Practice No. 5

### Say It Specifically

**The Five Ws & and an H:**

**who, what, where, when, why—and how**

1. Please bring your information to the meeting on Monday.
2. Your input is needed immediately.
3. Please call me at your earliest convenience.
4. I need the final revision of the proposal ASAP.



## Best Practice No. 6

### Say It Positively

#### 1. No email when dealing with emotional issues (yours or theirs)

#### 2. Take out negative words

##### 1. When the reader is at fault . . .

- *You forgot to include the price . . .*

##### 2. Did you imply the reader may be a liar?

- *You stated that . . .*

##### 3. Did you imply the reader is careless, unorganized, untrustworthy?

- *Your delay in responding . . .*
- *Since you haven't responded to my last three emails, . . .*

##### 4. Did you sound too authoritarian?

- *You need to . . .*
- *You will have to . . .*

##### 5. Be careful of sounding condescending

- *honestly . . . apparently . . . frankly . . . obviously . . .*
- *"What makes you think . . ."*
- Using multiple exclamation points or question marks (!!!) (???)

##### 6. Don't sound abrupt--use a tone that will help you get the response you need.

- *What are you looking for?*
- *Why is this an issue?*

##### 7. Sarcasm never works (particularly when you are annoyed or frustrated)



## Best Practice No. 6 (cont.) Say It Positively

### 1. Important to remember . . .

Remember, our customers (external and internal) want two things from us:

3. Do what we can do (fix what we can fix).

4. Make me feel \_\_\_\_\_  
\_\_\_\_\_  
\_\_\_\_\_  
\_\_\_\_\_

### 2. Use positive words

1. *We can't complete the RFP process with incomplete information.*

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2. *We have your letter in which you claim that your reservations to Disney World were incorrect.*

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3. *'We regret any inconvenience this may have caused you.'*

**Eliminate it entirely!**



## Best Practice No. 7

### Address a Targeted Audience

#### 1. Email sent to multiple people:

- **To:** Action-Takers
- **Cc:** Stakeholders
  - It's just an 'FYI' email for them (no action on their part)
  - When responding, ask permission before you copy someone else into their email.
  - Make sure a customer isn't in the Cc box!
- **Bcc:** The person receiving a **"blind copy."**
  - Be careful!

#### 2. Replying to multiple people

- 'Reply All' should not be your default key.
- Distribution Lists
  - Do you need any Sub-distribution lists?



## Best Practice No. 8

### Write Clear Subject Lines

#### 1. Pet Peeves:

■ “Meeting”

■ “Question”

■ “Hi there”

■ “Problem”

#### 2. Use Subject Lines the way newspapers use \_\_\_\_\_.

#### 3. Clear Subject Lines . . .

- Tell specifically what the email is about.
- Help the reader prioritize.
- Match the body.

**Instead of writing:** “Work Order 528”

**Write:** “Work Order 528—Deadline Change”

**Instead of writing:** “Benefits Review”

**Rewrite:** “Benefits Review—Open Enrollment”





## Best Practice No. 8

### Write Clear Subject Lines (cont.)

#### 4. Use Category Headings

<b>Action:</b> Call Mary with project numbers by Friday
<b>Attachment:</b> XYZ proposal
<b>Deadline Reminder:</b> June invoices due 6/23
<b>Confirmed:</b> Outline submitted to Consulting Concepts on 8/3
<b>Delivery:</b> Materials couriered to Consulting Concepts on 8/29 (Instead of "Materials delivered")

Write one of yours . . .

Subject Line:
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#### 5. Advantages of using categories:

- Email is easily understood
- Reader can sort their inbox by email categories  
(Actions, Info, Request, Confirmed, Delivery, FYI)

#### 6. Email Update: (For internal use only)

When the Subject Line says it all, write . . .

- EOM (end of message)
- NRN (no response needed)
- NT (no text)

*Deadline Reminder: March invoices due 3/23—EOM*

*FYI: Blood Drive Friday, 6/27, 8 a.m. – 4 .pm.--EOM*



## Best Practice No. 9

### Start With a Connectional Greeting

#### 1. Your greeting sets the tone.

It is particularly helpful if your message is not a happy one, if emotions are involved, or if people feel your email tends to sound bossy, rude, or intimidating.

#### 2. Match their personality style.

Examples:     *Dear Mr. Smith:*  
*Tom,*  
*Hi Tom,*  
*Good Morning,*  
*Good Morning Tom—*  
*Hello To All,*

Caution:     *Hey Guys,*  
*Hey Shannon,*  
**(what if your email is forwarded . . .)**  
*Shannon,*



## Best Practice No. 10

### Write in an Organized Path

#### Your Opening

#### Clear, Specific, Connectional

- Get to the point on the first screen

Remember BLUF

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- Let me know you read my email—be specific
  - *Thank you for your email regarding the ABC Proposal.*
  - *Thank you for your email regarding . . .*
- Dig up the specific content
  - People can understand it six months from now
  - It's also perceived as not being so blunt
- Examples
  - Instead of: *I will email it to you Friday.*
  - Write: *I will email the Clinton Proposal to you Friday.*
  
  - Instead of: *Sure.*
  - Write: *I will reprint 10 copies and deliver to Tom tomorrow.*



## **Best Practice No. 10**

### Write in an Organized Path

#### **Your Body**

#### **Easy to Read**

- 1. Try to limit your email to a single screen**
- 2. Not a long, unstructured ‘wall of words’—no one will read it**
- 3. Make it easy to read and understand—otherwise, they stop reading**
  - Use everyday words (your reader is just scanning)
  - Choose fonts that aren’t too small or too ornate
  - Write fairly short sentences and paragraphs
    - Use your eyes as the judge
    - Average sentence length:
 

Sentences: \_\_\_\_\_ words
    - Average paragraph lengths:
 

Non-technical material: \_\_\_\_\_ lines

Technical material: \_\_\_\_\_ lines
  - Chunk your key points
    - Bullets (double space them for easy reading)
    - Numbers, if sequencing
    - Bold, underlined Side Headings or Run-In Headings

Option 1

Option 2

Step 1

Step 2



## Best Practice No. 10

### Write in an Organized Path

#### Your Body (cont.)

#### Your Opening Paragraph

##### Option 1: Jump in immediately

*As you requested in our phone conversation yesterday, I summarized the additional procedures we will perform to test the overhead costs charged to the Carter project.*

*I have three questions regarding the Clinton project:*

- 1.
- 2.
- 3.

##### Option 2: Start with a Buffer sentence

*Thank you for calling Carboline about submitting a proposal for . . .*

*Thank you for meeting with me today.*

*Thank you for your question regarding the deadline change . . .*

*Thanks again for meeting with me this morning to discuss the . . .*



# Best Practice No. 10

## Write in an Organized Path

### (Your Body (cont.))

#### Your Closing



#### 1. Remember: Connect with your reader (WII-FM is their focus)

*Thanks for your help in getting . . .*  
*I appreciate your follow-up on the . . .*

#### 2. Your Connectional Closing

1. Next Steps (Call to Action)
2. Good Will Ending

*Thank you.*  
*I look forward to hearing from you. Thanks, John.*

*Call me after you meet with your committee, and we'll discuss the plan in more detail. Thanks, Laura.*

*I'll follow up with you the first of next week. Have a good weekend.*

*In the meantime, call or email with any questions or clarification. We're looking forward to working with you on your project.*

#### 3. Not Connectional—Delete Forever:

*Your cooperation in this matter will be greatly appreciated.*  
*Thank you for your prompt attention to this matter.*  
*Again, we apologize for any inconvenience this may have caused you .*

#### 4. Write One of Yours:

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## Best Practice No. 11

### Chunk Your Key Points

#### **Your Body (cont.)**

#### **Bullets or Numbers?**

**(Subject Line)** Recap: MEC Conversation 3/20

Good Morning, Jeff—

*As a follow-up to our phone conversation yesterday, I have put together the following list addressing everything we discussed.*

***These are the items you requested from me:***

- 
- 

***Following are the items I need to get from you:***

- 
- 

*Call me if there is any other information you need. Thanks, Jeff.*

Nancy

**(Subject Line) Questions:** Status of billing procedures

*Tom—I need 4 pieces of information regarding ABC Company:*

- *Current carrier*
- *Current & renewal rates*
- *Broker commission*
- *Medical benefit summaries*

Use numbers if you are sequencing or prioritizing.

*In order to meet our required deadline of April 10, I will need the above information by Friday.*

*Thanks, Tom.*

Nancy



## Best Practice No. 11

### Chunk Your Key Points (cont.)

#### **Your Body (cont.)**

##### **Use Side Headings and Run-In Headings**

**Subject:** Confirmation—Professional Presence Details

Hi Eric,

Here are answers to your questions regarding our Professional Presence seminar scheduled for November 3.

Enrollment  
size

You asked about enrollment size. I would really like to hold enrollment to 25 to ensure that everyone engages and doesn't just sit. Working with more than 25 tends to become more of a presentation than an interactive seminar.

Room set up  
& equipment

We've always set up in a U-shape before, and I think that is still the best. I know you have all the equipment, so I will bring my flash drive.

We'll touch base before our first session. Relax and enjoy your time in the mountains.

Nancy  
(314) 288-6666

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**Subject:** *Confirmation—Professional Presence Details*

*Hi Eric,*

*Here are answers to your questions regarding our Professional Presence seminar scheduled for November 3.*

**Class Size:** *I would really like to hold enrollment to 25 to ensure that everyone engages and doesn't just sit. Working with more than 25 tends to become more of a presentation than an interactive seminar.*

**Room Setup:** *Let's keep the U-shape.*

**Equipment:** *I know you have all the equipment, so I will bring my flash drive.*

*We'll touch base before our first session. Relax and enjoy your time in the mountains.*



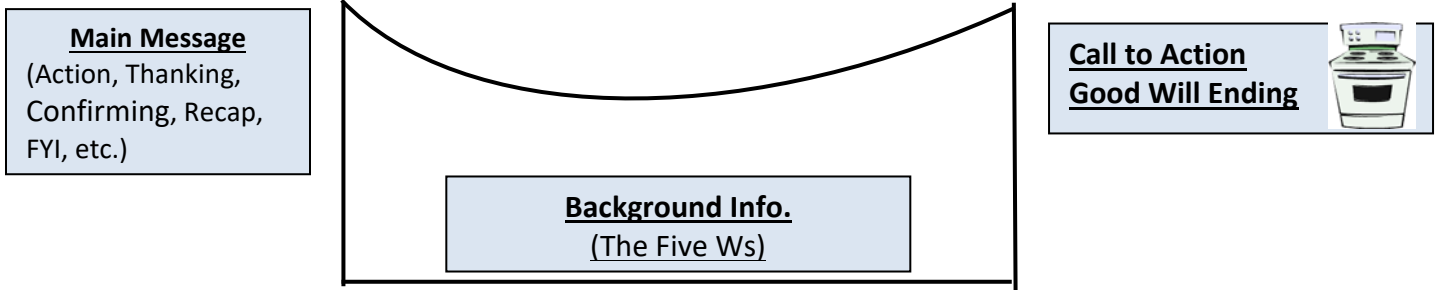


## Best Practice No. 12

Write by the Picture

### The 'YES' Format

('Yes' or 'No problem')



### Example of a 'Yes' Format

*Good Morning Tom,*

*I have three questions regarding the Clark project:*

1. \_\_\_\_\_
2. \_\_\_\_\_
3. \_\_\_\_\_

*I told Mike Hart I would call him back by 10 a.m. Tuesday. I'll watch for your email.*

*Have a good meeting today.*

*Nancy*

Main Message

Necessary Info

Call to Action  
Good Will Ending

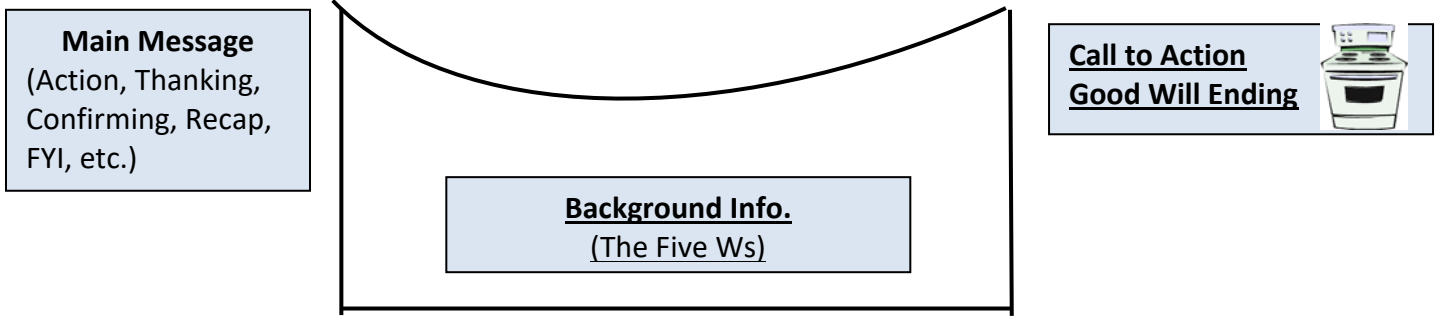


# Best Practice No. 12

Write by the Picture (cont.)

## The 'YES' Format

(‘Yes’ or ‘No problem’)



### More Examples of a ‘Yes’ Format

#### Routine Inquiry or Request

- Ask question/  
Make request
- Necessary  
Information
- Good will  
Ending

*Would you please send me a copy of your free brochure showing T-shirts, jackets, and sweatshirts as advertised in the August issue of Car Craft?*

*Our group needs this information as soon as possible because we need to order identical jackets and sweatshirts.*

*Thank you very much.*



#### Routine Reply

- Answer  
question
- Necessary  
Information
- Good will  
Ending

*Hello Mr. Johnson,*

*We are happy to reserve a room for you for the nights of July 14-16.*

*Your \$20 check will be applied to the special rate reserved for members of the EDP Association.*

*We look forward to meeting you and look forward to your stay with us at the Bluff Inn.*

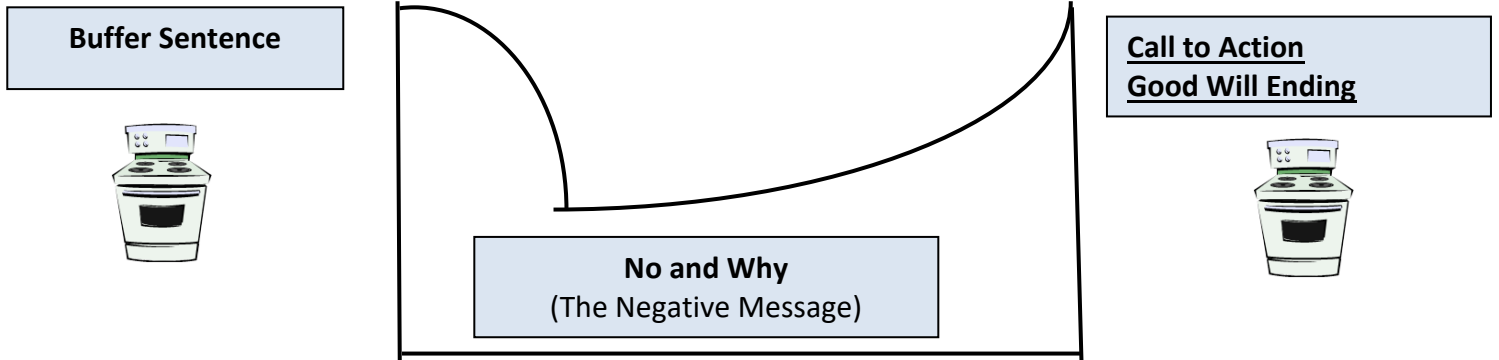


## Best Practice No. 12

Write by the Picture (cont.)

### The 'NO' Format

('No' or Negative Situation)



The "No" message contains three elements:

1. **Buffer**

A sentence that cushions the blow. A "Thank you" is an easy buffer to use.

*Thank you for your comments regarding the cancellation of your Order #34.*

2. **Negative Message**

Brief, but clear

3. **Good Will Ending**

The tone should come back up, closing on an upbeat statement.

*Your input is important to us; please call or write us anytime with your comments or questions.*

### Example of a 'No' Format

*Hello Logan,*

*Thank you for your letter regarding local business reports needed for your college degree.*

*However, because Alan Furniture Company is a wholly family-owned business enterprise, we do not publish our reports for distribution to the public.*

*We do wish you the best in completing your study and hope you have success in completing your work toward your college degree.*




## Writing Practice No Format

Tom Jackson, manager of program operations, has asked you to participate in the training of the new account managers on October 17.

You are already scheduled to conduct a full-day meeting with your auditors on that same day.

Send Tom an email message explaining your situation. Try to reschedule the training for a different date.

<p><u>Buffer</u></p> <p>Good Will Blurb</p>	<p><i>Hi Tom,</i></p>
<p>Negative Message (No and Why)</p> <p>Other Nuts &amp; Bolts</p>	
<p>Call to Action (if any)</p> <p>Good Will Ending</p>	



## Writing Practice


### No Format

#### (Sample Rewrite)

Tom Jackson, manager of program operations, has asked you to participate in the training of the new account managers on October 17.

You are already scheduled to conduct a full-day meeting with your auditors on that same day.

Send Tom an email message explaining your situation. Try to reschedule the training for a different date.

<p>Buffer</p> <p>Good Will Blurb</p>	<p>Hi _____,</p> <p>Thanks for the invitation to participate in the training of the new account managers on October 17. It's always fun to work with our new sales teams.</p>
<p>Negative Message (No and Why)</p> <p>Other Nuts &amp; Bolts</p>	<p>Unfortunately, I'm already booked on the 17<sup>th</sup> with a full day with our auditors.</p> <p>I am, however, available on October 18, 19, &amp; 20 if your dates are flexible.</p>
<p>Call to Action (if any)</p> <p>Good Will Ending</p>	<p>Give me a call and we'll compare calendars. I'm in the office all day tomorrow if you have a few minutes to talk.</p> <p>I'll watch for your call—looking forward to seeing you again and to working with our new account manage</p> <p>Nancy (314 ) 288-6666</p> 



# Now Write One of Your Own

## No Format


### (Practice)

#### Your Scenario ('No' Answer)

Our customer is asking for paint that we do not stock and will have to manufacture. They want it today.

Send an email to the customer explaining the situation and also offering suggestions on how we can expedite the process.

Question: What can we do for them?

<p>Buffer</p> <p>Good Will Blurb</p>	
<p>Negative Message (No and Why)</p> <p>Other Nuts &amp; Bolts</p>	
<p>Call to Action (if any)</p> <p>Good Will Ending</p>	



## Remember, Write It So They Will Read It . . .

### Write it Correctly . . .

- Rule 1: Two Sentences (conjunction comma)
- Rule 2: Just Two Verbs (no comma)
- Rule 3: Introductory words (keep them short)
- Rule 4: Extra material in the middle or the end (keep it short)
- Rule 4: Series commas (consider changing to bullets)
- Rule 5: Write it so they will read it--short, clear sentences and paragraphs

### Write it Professionally . . .

- Best Practice No. 1 Understand the Communication Hierarchy
- Best Practice No. 2 Always write respectfully—no matter what
- Best Practice No. 3 Manage Your Approach and your Tone
- Best Practice No. 4 Say It Simply
- Best Practice No. 5 Say it Specifically
- Best Practice No. 6 Say it Positively
- Best Practice No. 7 Address a Targeted Audience
- Best Practice No. 8 Write Clear Subject Lines
- Best Practice No. 9 Write a Connectional Greeting
- Best Practice No. 10 Write in an Organized Path
  - o Opening: Clear, Specific (get in immediately or start with a 'Buffer')
  - o Body: Organized Path
  - o Closing: Connectional Good Will Ending
- Best Practice No.11 Chunk your Key Points
- Best Practice No. 12 Write by the Pictures



**Corporate Membership**

**Compensation**

**Compliance**

**Background Screening**

**Recruiting & Talent Acquisition**

**HR Consulting**

**Training**

**Leadership Development**



**Missouri**

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