Tips on Writing

Decide What You Think First

When working on a challenging task — writing a speech, preparing an important presentation, or developing a new idea — it's helpful to get feedback from others. Do they think it's any good? In what direction do they think you should take it? But sometimes, too much feedback can drown out the most important opinion: your own. If you feel like you're getting too much input or are no longer sure what you think of your own work, take a break from the feedback. Decide what you think. This will build your confidence and trust in yourself. Once you've articulated and refined your own perspective, reach back out to your trusted advisors to get theirs.

Adapted from "How to Teach Yourself to Trust Yourself" by Peter Bregman.

Three Ways to Tighten Your Writing

Writing today—a report, memo, or email—must be short if you want people to read it. But succinctly expressing yourself can be tough. Here are three ways to trim your writing and say what you want in fewer words:

- **Refine it**. Take a hard look at the structure of your writing. Only include sections that are necessary to support your points.
- **Consider an informal tone**. Just because you're writing a report doesn't mean you need to be formal. Writing like a bureaucrat makes you use longer words and a complicated sentence structure. Adopting a more informal tone often helps you be direct and concise.
- **Cut and then cut more**. Look over your document sentence by sentence. If a sentence doesn't serve an important purpose, get rid of it.

Adapted from *Guide to Better Business Writing*.

Choose Clarity over Brevity

Writing experts emphasize the importance of using as few words as possible to deliver your message. The evolution of technology has supported this trend toward brevity; see tweets, status updates, and text messages as examples. But we may have gone too far. Sometimes messages that are too brief sacrifice clarity and leave out crucial information. When crafting your next message, choose clarity over brevity; include all relevant information and be sure it is logically organized. This is as true for PowerPoint presentations and research reports as it is for emails. Being brief is important but not at the risk of being misunderstood.

Adapted from "When Clarity is Not the Same as Brevity" by David Silverman.

Three Tips for Writing Reader-Friendly Memos

In business today, readers are time-pressed, content-driven, and decision-focused. To write effectively, remember that they want simple and direct communications. Here are three tips for giving readers what they want and need:

- **Avoid complex phrasing.** Writing elegantly is not important; delivering smart content is. Let the message stand out more than your language.
- **Be concise.** Many memo writers get hung up on "flow." But flowing sentences tend to be long and dense. You don't need choppy sentences, just hardworking ones that deliver content concisely.
- **Skip the jargon.** Jargon can be a useful way to communicate among experts, but you should never use jargon if it's meaningless, if you don't understand it, or when your audience isn't familiar with it.

Adapted from *Guide to Better Business Writing.*

Three Rules for Making Your Writing Clear

In business writing, you get points for clarity, not style. Instead of trying to wax poetic about your division's plans for the next 60 days, just make your point. Here are three ways to do that:

- **One idea per paragraph**. Novels hold several complex ideas and emotions in a single paragraph. In business writing, limit your thoughts to one per paragraph. When you have another suggestion, thought or idea, start a new paragraph.
- **Put your point in the first sentence**. Don't entice your readers with background information and build-up. No one has time for that. Make your primary point first. Then go into supporting detail.
- **Make it "scannable."** Few people read every word in an email. Use headers and bullet points so that your audience can quickly scan your message and understand your point.

Adapted from "How to Succeed in Business Writing: Don't Be Dickens" by David Silverman.