

DATA 552

Communication and Argumentation

Lecture 3: Writing (Tone, Language, and Style)

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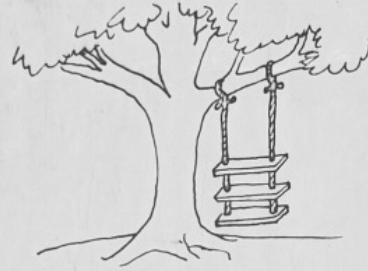
Recap

Oh No! I have to prepare this super important business document outlining my data findings. There's just so much information, and I really need to make a good impression. My career depends on it. What do I do!?

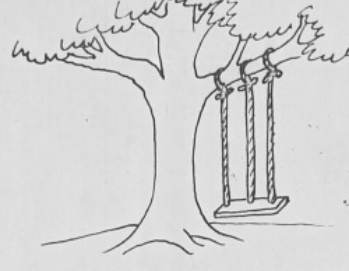


1. **Figure out your purpose:** what do you want to accomplish? What do you want your audience to do? Why do you want them to do this?
2. **Identify your audience:** who are they? What's important to them? What do they need from you? Why do they need this? How do they like to receive their information? Will they understand your information or do they need more background information or simplified terminology?
3. **Consider the context:** What type of communication are you sending? What platform will your audience read/hear it on? What is happening in the world and around your audience that might change how they think about and react to your information.

Tree swing picture



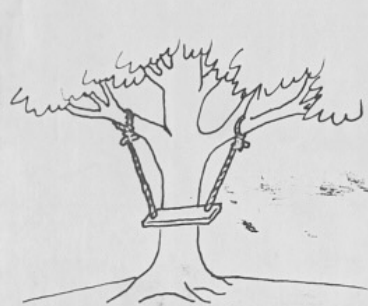
AS MARKETING REQUESTED IT



AS SALES ORDERED IT



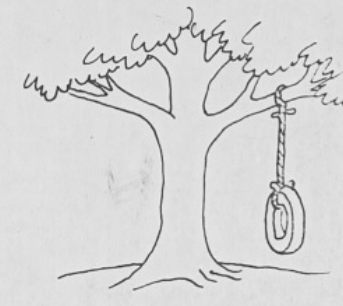
AS ENGINEERING DESIGNED IT



AS WE MANUFACTURED IT



AS FIELD SERVICE INSTALLED IT



WHAT THE CUSTOMER WANTED!!!

"COMMUNICATION" MEANS: SAYING AND HEARING HAVE THE SAME MESSAGE

Economic cost of poor writing

U.S. NEWS 

Bad Writing Costs Businesses Billions

It's not just a chore to wade through the badly written memos, emails, and other lousy business communication—this inefficiency costs us insane amounts of money.

Josh Bernoff | Updated Apr. 13, 2017 2:36PM EDT / Published Oct. 16, 2016 1:15AM EDT



The daily beast

Economic cost of poor writing



It could be the most costly piece of punctuation in Canada.

A grammatical blunder may force **Rogers Communications Inc.** to pay an extra \$2.13-million to use utility poles in the Maritimes after the placement of a comma in a contract permitted the deal's cancellation.

The controversial comma sent lawyers and telecommunications regulators scrambling for their English textbooks in a bitter 18-month dispute that serves as an expensive reminder of the importance of punctuation.

Rogers thought it had a five-year deal with **Aliant Inc.** to string Rogers' cable lines across thousands of utility poles in the Maritimes for an annual fee of \$9.60 per pole. But early last year, Rogers was informed that the contract was being cancelled and the rates were going up. Impossible, Rogers thought, since its contract was iron-clad until the spring of 2007 and could potentially be renewed for another five years.

Armed with the rules of grammar and punctuation, Aliant disagreed. The construction of a single sentence in the 14-page contract allowed the entire deal to be scrapped with only one-year's notice, the company argued.

Language buffs take note - Page 7 of the contract states: The agreement "shall continue in force for a period of five years from the date it is made, and thereafter for successive five year terms, unless and until terminated by one year prior notice in writing by either party."

[The Globe and Mail](#)

Deepwater horizon disaster

"The Presidential Commission that examined the causes of the disaster found that technology failures were of course part of the problem, but so was something else: a "failure of management" that included major "**communication failures.**" BP, its engineering firm Halliburton, and Transocean, which owned the rigs, had not shared a number of technological issues clearly with each other from the very conception of the drilling operation. And on the day of the explosion, rig technicians had conducted pressure tests that suggested something might be wrong—but the results of those basic tests had never been communicated clearly to, taken seriously by, or properly interpreted by those in charge. After the explosion, further communication failures complicated the oil-spill cleanup in the region."

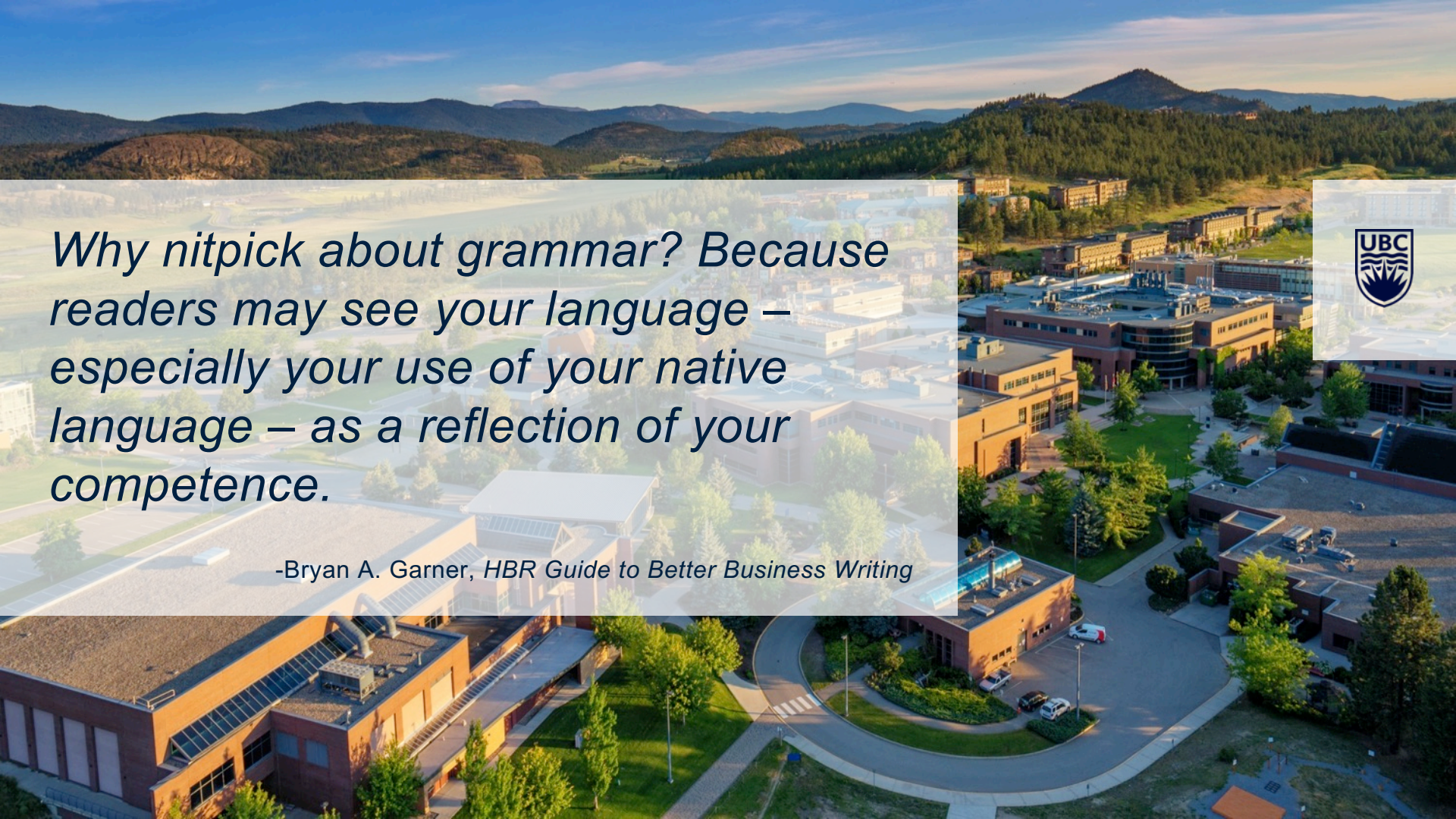
hurleywrite.com

Let's look at cases

[Go to the link](#)

➤ Do the H5P exercise

Portfolio: Pick another case and explain what costs/losses were incurred by this problem

An aerial photograph of a university campus, likely the University of British Columbia, showing various academic buildings, green spaces, and a winding road. In the background, there are forested hills and mountains under a clear blue sky. A semi-transparent white box is overlaid on the left side of the image, containing text.

Why nitpick about grammar? Because readers may see your language – especially your use of your native language – as a reflection of your competence.

-Bryan A. Garner, HBR Guide to Better Business Writing



Tone, Language, and Style: The Basics

- Communication is as much about ‘how’ you are presenting the information as it is about the ‘what’.

- You want to convey that you are
 - 1. Trustworthy
 - 2. Logical/Thoughtful
 - 3. Approachable

- And to do so consistently, across all spaces.

Tone, Language, and Style: The Basics

Garner reminds us "that every communication you send is a commentary on [you,] your team or company and [your]/its level of professionalism" (p. 87).

This doesn't, however, mean that you have to be ridiculously formal.

- *e.g., How may I be of assistance? vs. How may I help?*

Instead, you want to adopt a relaxed and direct tone.

Tone, Language, and Style: The Basics

Relaxed, professional, respectful, and direct

Do

- Address the audience directly. Use "you"
- If speaking as part of an organization/company, use "we"
- Use gender specific (personal) pronouns when possible, and gender neutral pronouns when appropriate
- Meet your audience half way

Tone, Language, and Style: The Basics

Relaxed, professional, respectful, and direct

Don't

- Be ~~aggressive or sarcastic~~

e.g.,

Given that Monday was a bank holiday, as declared by federal statute no less, your e-mail of the 17th of the present month did not come to my attention until yesterday. It is with no small degree of regret that we note that you deemed it necessary to send a follow-up-email to us regarding this matter, since we are desirous of establishing a relationship of mutual trust and respect.

On July 8, 2010, basketball superstar LeBron James announced that he was leaving the Cleveland Cavaliers to join the Miami Heat. An Ohio native, James made his announcement in a highly stylized ESPN special called "The Decision." It was like James were publicly thumbing his nose at Cleveland in as showy a way as possible. Within hours, internet and TV commentators were savaging him. Later, James himself said that if he had to do it again, "I probably would do [the announcement] a little bit different." Indeed, when he returned to the Cavaliers in 2011, he made the announcement quietly in an essay in *Sports Illustrated*.

vs.

Because Monday was a bank holiday, I did not receive your e-mail message of the 17th until yesterday. Naturally I was chagrined that you had to write a second time. But of course I want you to call on me whenever I can help.

Identify tones

You're making great progress, and I'm confident that with your talent and dedication, you'll achieve outstanding results!

As your manager, I must emphasize the importance of meeting our deadlines. I expect everyone's reports on my desk by 9 AM Monday.

I value your hard work, but I've noticed some errors in your recent submission. Let's go over it together to ensure it meets our standards.

I'm truly sorry to hear about the issue with your order. We're taking immediate steps to resolve this for you.

Don't miss out on this opportunity to enhance your home with our eco-friendly solutions. Act now and be part of the green revolution!

Fantastic news! Our team has been doing an incredible job, and I'm absolutely thrilled about the heights we're going to reach together! Keep up the amazing work!

Tone, Language, and Style: The Basics

- Simple – standard, every day English, keep sentences to 20 words or less, avoid unnecessary words
- Specific – define acronyms, avoid jargon unless you *know* your audience knows it
- Easy-to-understand – use complete sentences, follow basic grammar rules

Tone, Language, and Style: The Basics

e.g.,

Jargon filled, Lengthy

Efficiency measures that have been implemented by the company with strong involvement of senior management have generated cost savings while at the very same time assisting in the building of a culture that is centered around the value of efficiency. We anticipate that, given this excising of unnecessary expenditures and enhanced control of other expenditures, the overall profitability of the company will be increased in the near term of up to four quarters.

vs.

Simple, easy to understand

Our senior management team has cut costs and made the company more efficient. We expect to be more profitable for the next four quarters.

Tone, Language, and Style: The Basics

Simple, specific, and easy-to-understand

Don't

- As Garner explains, “use two words for one, three words for two, and so on”

e.g., January of 2019 *vs.* January 2019

The smiley face was in violation of business etiquette. *vs.* The smiley face violates business etiquette.



Tone, Language, and Style: The Basics

Get rid of all the unnecessary words!

- the question as to whether
- there is no doubt but that
- use for fuel purposes
- his is a man who
- in a hasty manner
- this is a subject that
- her story is a strange one.
- the reason why is that



- whether
- no doubt (doubtless)
- used for fuel
- he
- hastily
- this subject
- Her story is strange.
- because

Tone, Language, and Style: The Basics

Simple, specific, and easy-to-understand

Don't

- Use jargon or “bizspeak”

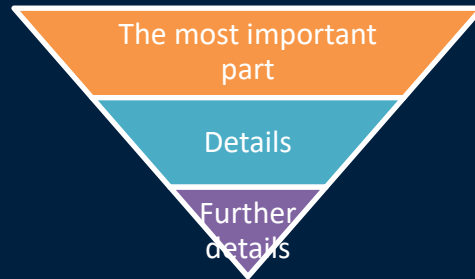
e.g., back of the envelope, drill down, ducks in a row, operationalize, let's take this offline, level the playing field, seamless integration, strategic alliance, thinking outside the box

These terms don't make you sound cool or smart. They suggest you're too lazy to say what you really mean.

Tone, Language, and **Style**: The Basics

Ideal style is - to-the-point, easy to follow, and enjoyable

- To-the-point – sticks to the primary theme, tells a cohesive story
- Easy to follow – use the ‘journalistic triangle’



- Enjoyable – use varied sentence structures, synonyms for words that need repeating

Tone, Language, and **Style**: The Basics

Do

- Show instead of tell

e.g.,

He was a bad boss.

He got a promotion based on his assistant's detailed reports, but then – despite the company's record profits – denied the assistant even routine cost-of-living raises.

The company lost its focus and floundered.

The CEO acquired five unrelated subsidiaries – as far afield as a paper company and a retailer of children's toys – and then couldn't service the \$26 million in debt.

Tone, Language, and Style

Concrete business writing is persuasive because it's evidence-based, clear, and memorable.

-Bryan A. Garner, *HBR Guide to Better Business Writing*

Try it: Improving Emails

Portfolio: Please consider how the two emails (on the paper in front of you) can be improved?

Instructions: In pairs, please rewrite the two emails using the ideas discussed in class.

- It may be easier to have one person do the writing, and then to have that person send the revised draft to the other member so they can have a copy for their portfolio.

Email One: The Not-So-Great Version

Sarah –

It was hard making headway with Jim Martinez, but finally we're looking (in the best-case scenario) at a demonstration of what our software can do by mid-May, as I established in my first telephone conference with Jim last Monday at 9:00 a.m. He was out Wednesday and Thursday (I didn't see any reason to try calling on Tuesday), but on Friday he told me that we'd need a sample app. But prior to that, Magnabilify requires an NDA. Tuesday's meeting should clarify things. Let me know what you think.

Frank

Email Two: The Not-So-Great Version

Subject: Hello there!

Hal –

It's been ages, I know, but I've been meaning to tell you just how effective I think you've been as the editor of the Daily Metropolitan these past seven years. Although I canceled my subscription a few years back (LOL) – the papers kept cluttering the driveway – I buy a copy at the coffee shop almost every day, and I always tell people there just how good the paper is. Who knows, I may have won you some subscribers with all my gushing praise! Believe me, I'm *always* touting the good old *DM*.

Anyhoo, I have a mentee I'd like you to meet. You'll soon be thanking me for introducing you to her. She would like an internship, and I know she'll be the best intern you've ever had. Her name is Glenda Jones, and she is A-1 in every way. May I tell her you will contact her? (With good news, I hope!) It can be unpaid. I know your paper has fallen on tough times – but she wants to get into the business anyway! Silly girl. Ah, well, what can you do when journalism seems like it's just in the blood?

Expectantly yours,

Myra

P.S. You'll thank me for this!



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