



597 Writing Sample – Global Professional Communications

Another Point of View: connecting with international audiences

Your ability to look at the meaning of behavior from a point of view other than your own is crucial to good communication – not knowing or caring about the context (culture) of the recipient of your communication can increase difficulties. For example, the level of formality that is expected in a professional communication can differ across cultures.

To communicate effectively you often need to spend some time considering cultural differences and then draft your documents accordingly. Because your goal is often to persuade your readers to act, you must analyze the intended reader as best you can. This analysis affects the planning, organizing, and designing of all aspects of the document--from word choice to your overall strategy and structure. In this assignment you can intentionally consider how to frame your message in order to achieve your goals. This is persuasive communication rather than informational or transaction-oriented and thus, tone, argument and overall organization of information are key considerations. Read through the case and then complete the writing assignment that follows.

Gray Point and Ghanoil

You are the VP of Operations for Gray Point, a US-based oil services contractor that provides converted tankers to produce oil from offshore fields. Gray Point's converted tanker *Scorpio* has been producing oil for Ghanoil P&P, a small division of a large West African national oil company, for the past seven years at an offshore field. Two years remain on the present contract. Gray Point hopes to renew the contract for use of the vessel at another field when the present contract expires.

In reality, other opportunities for the vessel are limited. Gray Point's CEO has made the contract renewal a high priority for you and your group. Ghanoil pays a fee of \$40,000 per day for lease and operation of the *Scorpio*, a rate that has allowed Gray Point to fully recover its initial investment in the vessel. Oil production has been running at around 7,000 barrels per day, giving Ghanoil a revenue stream on the order of \$770,000 per day at current prices.

Two years ago, as oil production began to decline, Ghanoil asked Gray Point to install a small natural gas compression system aboard the *Scorpio*, so that it could implement gas lift operations, a technique used to help sustain production from aging fields. The need for a gas lift had been anticipated, and Gray Point's contract with Ghanoil stipulated that, if a gas lift compression system were ever installed,

Ghanoil would reimburse Gray Point within 45 days for all documented costs. These costs came to \$3 million and, under the terms of the contract, were invoiced to Ghanoil.

Gas lift operations began 2 years ago aboard the *Scorpia*, but despite repeated requests, Ghanoil has not yet reimbursed Gray Point the \$3 million. The difficulty seems to arise from Ghanoil's belief that some provisions of the contract are unfair and should be set aside. Ghanoil's general manager, Seth Adu, has maintained that installation of the gas lift compressor represents a capital improvement to the *Scorpia*, and thus Gray Point should bear the cost. He and other Ghanoil officials have also objected to the fact that Ghanoil is contractually bound to pay Gray Point the \$40,000 day-rate even if the vessel is not producing oil.

As vice president of operations, you have profit and loss responsibility for the *Scorpia* and Gray Point's other production tankers. Gray Point's executives have made it clear to you that collecting the \$3 million, preferably with annual interest of 8%, is a priority. Securing payment from Ghanoil will be viewed favorably by your company.

You are tasked with writing a letter to Seth Adu requesting payment of the \$3 million. You have known Seth for a few years, as you both were part of the negotiating team for the follow-on contract, when Gray Point agreed to reduce the original day-rate in exchange of the security afforded by a six-year extension. You know he received his master's degree in petroleum engineering at a Canadian university. Your business relations have been cordial. You have talked with him about his family and once met his eldest son.

You have had a few face-to-face interactions with Seth, however; you do not have substantial knowledge about business culture, values and preferences in his region of the world. Some modest reading on the subject has indicated to you that broadly speaking, the business culture is collectivist, high power distance and risk avoiding. Decision-making requires consultation among all parties, and things don't happen until the highest-ranking official signals approval.

Your Assignment:

You will write **2** communications: first, you will write a letter to Seth Adu requesting payment of the \$3 million. Second you will write a memo to you your supervisor, Cam Chan explaining your strategy and choices you made in your letter to Seth (e.g. content, language, sequencing of information). Also describe the tone you have chosen to convey your message. Include your analysis of Mr. Adu from what you know. What factors could influence how your letter is interpreted? Each document should not exceed one page. Use headings in your memo to your supervisor to make the organization and content of your communication visible to her.