

NSLAP WELLNESS TIP: How to improve your writing skills

The following is an article excerpt from Homewood Human Solutions™, your health and wellness provider.

Good writing skills are essential to communicating messages in a clear and persuasive manner. The following guidelines can help improve any written communication – letters, memos, email, etc.

Be clear and concise. Written words do not have the advantage of voice tone, body language or dialogue (two-way conversation). Thus, be clear and concise, leaving no doubt about what you intend to communicate (e.g., use precise names, model numbers, dollar amounts, etc.).

Get to the point. The reader is probably already burdened by too much paperwork.

Use easy-to-understand language. Short words, short sentences.

If you are asking someone to take action, tell them what it is you want them to do. Otherwise, they may do nothing or decide what to do for themselves. If you are taking action on someone else's request, tell them what you are going to do.

Be positive and solution oriented. Even bad news can be delivered in good ways. Try to include solutions, what you can do for the person or customer.

Reinforce your commitment to a positive result, no matter how negative the situation. Communicate that it is your priority to meet the customer's needs.

Convey a personal, friendly attitude. Letters that are personal and friendly do much to build strong relationships between the reader and your company.

Example: We would like to invite you to join our team meeting, scheduled for March 13. We would also like to give you a facility tour if you have the time.

Be accurate. Make sure the information is accurate and/or the source of information is reliable. Double-check for errors and be sure that you have not misspelled the recipient's name.

Express confidence and commitment. Show a commitment to standing by what you say. If you have uncertainty about anything, research these things before you write the letter.

Example: Your order has been scheduled to be completed by March 17. We will contact you no later than March 11 to confirm that schedule. If we are unable to fill your order by the scheduled date, we will provide you with a number of alternatives to help you meet your time demands.

Note: Managers, fellow supervisors, employees and customers will accept news better when it is concise, clearly stated, accurate, solution oriented, personal and error free.

If you are uncertain who, if anyone, should receive copies, copy anyone who is directly involved in or working on the subject. Do not send copies to everyone or you will burden people who should not be

receiving the information, and/or you will have to field questions and responses from people who are confused about the message they received.

If uncertain:

1. Refer to relevant distribution lists.
2. Check with your boss or someone else knowledgeable on the matter.
3. Ask the person directly if they want to receive a copy.

Checklist

When writing memos or letters, use the following checklist (the items may vary depending on the nature of the communication). Review what you have written and compare it to this checklist. Revise what you have written as needed.

- Does it command the reader's attention?
- Does it arouse the interest in the reader?
- Does it get the reader involved?
- Does it get the reader to take action (promising a benefit, providing proof of the need for something, communicating a sense of urgency, etc.)?
- Is it reader oriented rather than writer oriented?
- Is it clear and concise?
- Is it tactful and courteous?
- Is the tone conversational and the language simple?
- Is the information useful to the reader?
- Is it likely to produce the desired impact on the reader?

*For more information and support with how to improve your writing skills, along with resources and counseling in other life topics, visit the NSLAP website at www.nslap.ca. Please note that **NSLAP** is your "company" name when you register. When you call the NSLAP number at **1-866-299-1299** (Français: 1-866-398-9505; TTY: 1-888-384-1152), your call will be answered any time, day or night, 365 days per year.*