

Getting to Grips with Business Writing

Business Writing Tips #1 - #5



Tip #1

Know what you are trying to achieve

Sounds like common sense, doesn't it? Surprisingly a lot of people sit down to write without thinking about what they want to achieve, thinking that it will come to them as they write. And it may. Or it may not.

If you don't know what it is you want to achieve you'll find it really hard to hit the right target.

Here's a useful question to ask yourself before you compose your next business letter, memo or email:

What do I want the person to do as a result of this letter [memo, email]?"

Tip #2

Pretend you're a reporter and remember who, what, when, where, why and how

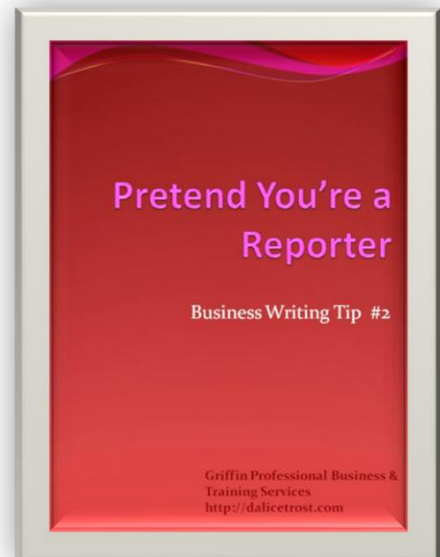
It's too easy to sit down and write an email and hit send.

'Why "too easy"?' I hear you ask.

The lightning has struck. You have an idea and you just want to get it down and implemented as quickly as possible. Or you're in hurry because you've got so much work to do.

It's too easy because with word processing software we don't need to plan and check. We can quickly type up the words as they flow through our brains and hit the send key.

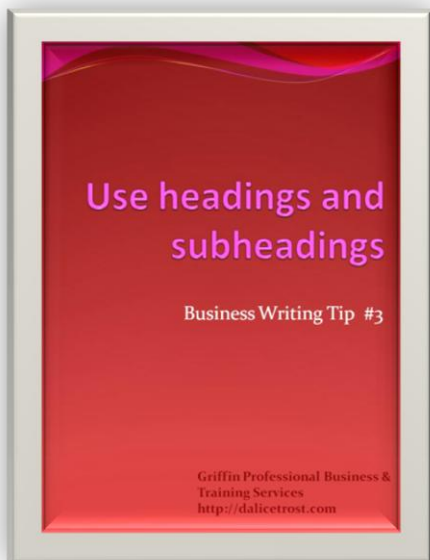
But what happens when we do this? We often forget to include some vital piece of information.



When you sit down to write, think about those wonderful question words.

- Who?
- What?
- When?
- Where?
- Why?
- How?

Answering these questions will ensure you've got your subject covered before you hit send. Now that's not too difficult, is it? Journalists use this technique every time they write a story. Make it work for you.



Tip #3

Use headings and subheadings to make content easy to scan

Each and every one of us has to read. And we have to read and take in information from many different sources. And we have to take in a lot of it.

When we're writing, we need to think of our reader. We need to make it easy for our reader to get the main points of our message.

Ways to Do It

- Use headings to break up the text and make it easy to scan.
- Make them bold, so they stand out from the rest of the text.

Do Headings Really Make Documents Easier to Read?

Absolutely. Your reader can quickly run their eyes down a page or a screen and find the information that they need.

Example

If you're writing a proposal you will have different sections that you need to include, but not everyone will be interested in all the detail. A proposal might include:

- Executive Summary
- Background
- Identification of Needs
- Proposed Services

- Benefits
- Implementation Plan
 - Methodology
 - Implementation Team
 - Implementation Schedule
- Testing and Evaluation
- Costs
- Conclusion

By using headings and sub-headings, your reader can skim through the document and read the parts that concern them most. If the document is written without headings, it's much more difficult to find your way through and some people just won't bother.

Remember, it's all about your reader. You want them to be able to get the information that they need quickly and easily.

Tip #4

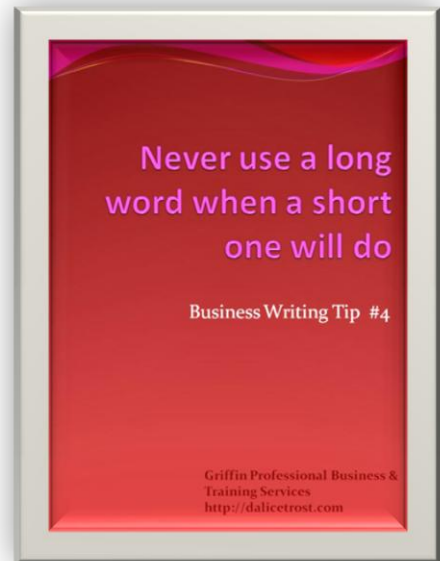
Never use a long word where a short one will do

Joe Glaser said why we should do this so well in his book *Understanding Style* that I'm going to borrow his words.

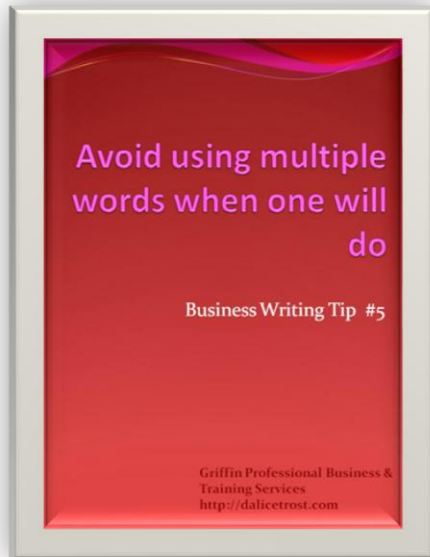
"Short words are stronger than long ones. They are usually more particular, more concrete, more emphatic. They shrink the distance between writer and reader ... Long words widen the gap between writer and reader, sometimes, as in the **official style**, in order to build the writer up at the reader's expense."

The following list gives you plain English alternatives for some commonly used multisyllabic words.

Commonly used words	Plain English Replacement
Utilise	Use
Disseminate	Send out
Ascertain	Find out
Strategise	Plan
Optimum	Best
Straightforward	Simple
Uncomplicated	Easy



I suggest you visit this link <http://www.plainenglish.co.uk/files/alternative.pdf> for a comprehensive list of plain English alternatives (“The A to Z of Alternative Words”).



Tip #5

Avoid using multiple words when one will do

This tip follows on from Tip #4. For some reason people seem to think they sound more intelligent, more authoritative, more I don't quite know what, when they use more words and long sentences.

All they really do is create distance with their readers. They make it harder for readers to find the message.

Here are some examples.

Commonly Used Expression	Plain English Replacement
For the purpose of	For
The majority of	Most
In order to	To
Provide an introduction	Introduce
On a daily basis	Daily
On a regular basis	Routinely
Furnish an explanation for	Explain
Afford an opportunity	Let, allow
At an early date	Soon

Now the thing about these tips that you need to remember is that they are tips, not rules.

Look at this tip. Use one word rather than more than one – but only when ‘it will do’. You see, there will be times when the Plain English version of what you write uses more words. When this happens you will be replacing a multisyllabic, perhaps archaic, word

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with short, simple, easily understandable words. For example you might write, 'get around' in place of 'circumvent'.

Think about what you're writing; think about the audience; think about clarity. Then use the best word or words for the job.

If you haven't already downloaded it, here's the link for "The A to Z of Alternative Words". Here's the link. <http://www.plainenglish.co.uk/files/alternative.pdf>

About the Author



Dalice Trost is a freelance B2B copywriter, TEFL teacher and corporate training provider. She works with companies and individuals to ensure that they are communicating effectively in English. Her extensive network of experienced, proven international trainers in all aspects of business differentiates her from the crowd of corporate training providers. Visit her website at <http://dalicetrost.com> for details of the corporate training and business services she offers through her Prague based company, Griffin Professional Business & Training Services.

Dalice has worked in both the public and private sectors in Australia and the UAE, and is now enjoying European life in the Czech Republic. She spent more than 10 years working for a major B2B conference and training provider developing conference and training programs in just about all aspects of business. Her first Kindle ebook, *A Busy Person's Guide to Networking*, is available from Amazon. Follow @dalicejt on Twitter.

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