

We hope you learned the important link  
between leadership and communication.

*The next Module examines  
one form of communication  
-- communicating in writing.*



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## **Module 8**

### **Professional Written Communication**

## Objectives

- Understand the importance of written communication.
- Recognize the seriousness of the permanence of written communication.
- Demonstrate techniques for writing improvement.

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As with all communication,  
what you write or type  
begins with  
the “receiver” or “listener.”

Effective written communication  
happens when the recipient  
*reads* and hopefully *understands*  
the message.

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## Forms of Written Communication

- memos
- letters
- emails
- newsletters
- comments
- notes
- texts
- infographics
- reports
- handouts
- agendas
- magazines
- social media
- online

**Which forms do you use most often?**

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Barry Fagan, PE

Environmental Program Engineer, Retired

Effective Mechanical Communication

## Overall Style



- There is no one correct style for ALDOT as a whole.
- Style does matter.
- Style affects our message, our brand, and our intent.
- Use what carries our message most effectively to the audience.
- Style varies based on what we know about our audience.

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## Other Electronic Communication Forms

- Texts
- Blogs
- Social Media
  - Twitter
  - LinkedIn
  - Facebook
  - Instagram



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## Written Communication Considerations

1. What is it for?
2. Who are you?
3. Who is it for?
4. Will it spread?



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## Written Communication Considerations

### 1. What is it for?

- The more specific we are, the easier it is for people to understand our intent.
- The more specific we are in our intent, the more likely it is to succeed.

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## Written Communication Considerations

### 2. Who are you?

Our writing needs to verify not only our position but also our part in the message, our place in the situation of which we are writing, and how we are involved.

- Supervisor
- Project manager
- Official
- External or internal stakeholder
- Member of team

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## Written Communication Considerations

### 3. Who is it for?

*Keep the audience in mind at all times:*

- Who is this designed to reach?
- What do they believe?
- Do they trust you?
- Are they inclined to take action?
- What is their personality?
- What is their interest level?

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## Written Communication Considerations

### 4. Will it spread?

- Will it be shared with others?
- Shared action is amplified action.



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## Email Standards in General

- Make it short and to the point.
- Target the message to the audience.
- Provide an effective subject line.
- State the purpose clearly.
- End with desired action.

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## Email Standards in General

Emails should be no more than six sentences long and should contain no more than the following information:

- Why are you contacting the person?
- Why should the recipient help you?
- Who are you?
- What is your cause or reason for writing?
- What do you want?
- What is the next step?

--Guy Kawasaki , author of *Enchantment*

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## Ten Tips for Better Business Writing

### 1. Less Is More.

- Use words sparingly.
- Cut out the verbose wording.
- First sentence—tell the reader what the entire document concerns.
- Make your point(s) in the next 3 to 5 sentences in the paragraph.
- Following paragraphs—begin each with a sentence that speaks concisely to the content in the paragraph.

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## Ten Tips for Better Business Writing

### 2. Avoid jargon.

- Make every word mean something important to help understanding.
- Use plain language.
- Jargon can be inefficient because the eye slides right past it without absorbing meaning.
- Some jargon is unavoidable.



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## Ten Tips for Better Business Writing

### 3. Write once, check twice.

- Proofread immediately after you write and again later.
  - Typos are embarrassing and unprofessional.
  - Errors of tone might otherwise escape you and cause trouble.
- People may judge you for mistakes.
- Ensure your work is right before letting it reach its audience:
  - Write what you want it to say.
  - Use the appropriate tone.

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## Ten Tips for Better Business Writing

### 4. Pay special attention to names, titles, and gender.

If you are not positive about the spelling of someone's name, the correct job title (and what it means), or the gender, do one of the following:

- Check with someone who knows.
- Locate the correct information on a website or social media.
- Use gender-neutral language.

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## Ten Tips for Better Business Writing

### 5. Save Templates

- Whenever you write an especially good letter, email, memo, or other document, save it as a template for future use.
- A pre-written document, already proofread, can save not only time but also the embarrassment of errors.
- Make sure to remove any specific information—e.g., people's names or company names.

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## Ten Tips for Better Business Writing

### 6. Be professional, but not necessarily formal.

- Formal language is not necessary or even productive.
- Formal language belongs in legal documents.
- Informal should not mean unprofessional.
- Keep the personal information, jokes, and snarky comments out.
- Many businesses are required to keep copies of all correspondence.

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## Ten Tips for Better Business Writing

### 7. Remember The 5 W's Plus H.

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



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## Ten Tips for Better Business Writing

### 8. Make sure you have a “Call To Action.”

- Most business communication is meant to achieve a purpose.
- Include a call to action, something the reader is expected to do.
- Include the timeliness of what you want the reader to do.
- Do not leave it to your reader to decide what to do.
- Readers need to know:
  - Exactly why the info was sent to them
  - What is expected of them

If no action is needed, then simply state the facts.

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## Ten Tips for Better Business Writing

### 9. Do not offer too many choices.

- Ideally, do not offer any.
- At most, offer two options and ask them to pick one.
- Too many choices can lead to decision paralysis.
- Place choices or decisions in bullet format when writing.
- End your correspondence with “I await your response to the question.”

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## Ten Tips for Better Business Writing

### 10. Keep a reference card for confusing words.

THERE and THEIR—**There** refers to a place (over **there**). It is also a “place holder” at the beginning of a sentence. **Their** is a possessive word, showing that something belongs to **them**.

- Your copy is over **there** on the desk. **There** is a message for you.
- The team members have finished **their** review.

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## Ten Tips for Better Business Writing

### 10. Keep a reference card for confusing words.

AFFECT and EFFECT—**Affect** is almost always a verb. **Effect** is almost always a noun.

- How will this new policy **affect** the community?
- Will this new policy have an **effect** on the community?

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## Ten Tips for Better Business Writing

### 10. Keep a reference card for confusing words.

ASSUME and PRESUME—Both of these words mean “suppose” or “take for granted.” However, **assume** refers to supposing something to be true without proof, while **presume** refers to supposing with probability, reason, or evidence.

- They just **assume** the bridge is safe because it always has been.
- The pilot has been missing for five days and is **presumed** dead.

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## Ten Tips for Better Business Writing

### 10. Keep a reference card for confusing words.

CAPITOL and CAPITAL—**Capitol** (with an O) has only one meaning: the building in a center of government where the legislature meets. **Capital** (with an A) has several meanings: the city center of government for a state or a country; money raised and invested in a project; description of a letter in upper case (as for a proper name); description of an offense that carries the death penalty.

- Statuary Hall is inside the United States **Capitol**.
- Montgomery is the **capital** of Alabama.
- He is raising **capital** for his third business venture.
- Always begin a proper name with a **capital** letter.
- I believe that type of murder is a **capital** offense.

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## Ten Tips for Better Business Writing

### 10. Keep a reference card for confusing words.

CONTINUAL and CONTINUOUS—**Continual** describes events that occur often or recur off and on. **Continuous** describes an event that is ongoing without interruption.

- That country has experienced five years of **continuous** warfare.
- This airline is known for **continual** breakdowns.

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## Ten Tips for Better Business Writing

### 10. Keep a reference card for confusing words.

FARTHER and FURTHER—**Farther** refers to a measurable physical distance. **Further** refers to figurative or abstract distance.

- John lives much **farther** from the office than I do.
- There will be no **further** discussion of this topic until next week.

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## Ten Tips for Better Business Writing

### 10. Keep a reference card for confusing words.

THAT, WHICH, or WHO—The easiest choice is to use **who** or **whom** for people, **that** for necessary information or things NOT set off by commas, and **which** for “nice to know” information set off by commas and not necessary to the meaning of the sentence.

- Paul Cane is the supervisor **who** handles those complaints.
- To **whom** was he addressing his remarks?
- This is a statute **that** has been on the books for twenty years.
- This statute, **which** has been on the books for twenty years, makes no mention of drones.

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6<sup>th</sup> Division Engineer, Retired

Effective Mechanical Communication

## Effectiveness Audit

Score the following questions on a scale of 1 to 10 with 1 being strongly disagree and 10 being strongly agree.

- \_\_\_\_\_ 1. I am a good communicator.
- \_\_\_\_\_ 2. I am a good writer.
- \_\_\_\_\_ 3. My writing has improved over the years.
- \_\_\_\_\_ 4. (1 = I don't give enough detail sometimes.) (10 = I am long-winded in my writing.)
- \_\_\_\_\_ 5. I have attended a technical writing course in the past.

## Final Thoughts

*If you have to explain it, you've already lost.*

Jon Gray, Strategy Communications, ALDOT Public Relations Consultant

*Your grammar is a reflection of your image.*

*Good or bad, you have made an impression.*

*And like all impressions, you are in total control.*

Jeffrey Gitomer