

Learn to Write Reader-Friendly E-mail and Text Messages

Participants in CommuniSkills workshops tell us they are increasingly living in a Blackberry world, where their managers, co-workers, and clients communicate a wide variety of messages via email and text messages. As a result, an important management talent is the ability to write short messages that read well on the small screens on which your co-workers and clients receive their messages. Given that your readers' time is limited and that the small font of screen text is more difficult to read than the larger fonts typically used in paper documents, apply the principles below to compose electronic messages that permit efficient processing of information while also reflecting well on you as a professional.

1. *Limit email and text messages to simple messages that can fit on 1-2 screens.* Keep in mind that a single screen has a significantly shorter line length and fewer total lines than a single piece of paper. As a result, writers have less space in which to make their points, especially in light of research that shows readers prefer 1-2 screen messages and many do not read beyond that length.
2. *Use headings to create a scannable outline of the message.* They can aid reader comprehension and produce a positive impression of the writer as an organized person who takes time to be professional in everything he or she writes. Also consider creating a new paragraph when addressing address next steps, a physical sign that the writer is an action-oriented problem solver.

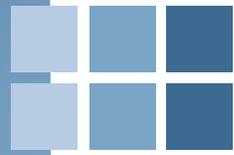
Compare the examples below and see how following the principles above dramatically improve the clarity and organization of the original message.

Poorly written:

SUBJECT: IT

The IT Department bases its budget plan each year on information received from client organizations. About this time each year we get information on projected hardware and software needs and special projects from each client department. You have been identified as the contact for your department. Please provide me with this kind of information at your earliest convenience. This information is very important to IT as we plan for next year.

COMMENTS: Directory description, IT, is unclear. Message contains unnecessary detail and omits important detail, such as When a response is needed. Main purpose is hidden near end of message. Reasons for complying may not be persuasive to readers.



More effectively written:

Subject: Request for list of your IT needs

Request: By March 1 please send me a list of your department's projected IT needs for the 2008/09 budget year. This information will help assure that your department gets the IT support it needs next year by giving us the data to plan appropriate staffing.

Details: In your list include the following information for 2008/09.

- New or replacement hardware needs
- New or replacement software needs
- Special projects requiring IT support

Next Steps: Please respond using the attached spreadsheet. Thank you.

COMMENTS: Reader immediately gets clear idea of What is being requested and When a response is expected, followed by persuasive Whys. Details give reader important guidance. Next Steps indicate How the reader is to respond. Headings suggest document is well organized and professionally designed.

As managers, we need to demonstrate how to adapt effective writing and document design techniques to electronic communication because it is a primary means of communication managers and clients are using at work and at play. As the example above demonstrates, how we write email and text messages matters: that, in fact, job performance is, in part, judged by how well we adapt the rules of good writing to email and text messages, the most widely used media for communication within the business world. And, as demonstrated, by following simple guidelines suggested above, executives can write clear, easily understood messages that gain positive responses from readers.

Find out more:

Communiskills offers trainings to bring effective communication to your organization.

Visit our website, www.Communiskills.com, for more information.